



Conflict in Mountainous Karabakh

A scientific research in International Relations

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Abstract

Mountainous Karabakh is a conflict region in the recent territory of Azerbaijan with the population of ethnic Armenians. It is a part of historical Karabakh and the reason why it had given autonomy, was to underline an ethnic factor of its population. All member states of the United Nations, beside Armenia, recognize Mountainous Karabakh as Azerbaijani territory with ethnic Armenian population. Mountainous Karabakh is a disputed territory between Azerbaijan and Armenia and both sides have their claims on this territory. Historical sources about Mountainous Karabakh are various and confusing. In 14th century, Safavid Empire gave autonomy-like status to Mountainous Karabakh and this status was retained during the next four centuries. Until 1991, Mountainous Karabakh was a little isolated region with an autonomous oblast status within the Azerbaijan SSR. In 1992, Mountainous Karabakh declared itself as independent republic, which resulted in armed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Conflict in Mountainous Karabakh is a clash of political ambitions. Positions of parties still exclude each other.

The scientific research 'Conflict in Mountainous Karabakh' is based on the qualitative research method and analyzes primary and secondary documents. It includes: introduction, main part, major research, conclusion and bibliography. Major research represents reasons of the conflict and the security dilemma: geographical factor, ethnographic factor, nationalism, Russia, ethnic affinity problem, different historical sources and economic factor. The last part of this work involves recommendations for the conflict resolution.

Key words: ethnic conflict, Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia, OSCE, Minsk Group, European Union

Introduction

Mountainous Karabakh is a regional conflict in the recent territory of Azerbaijan with the population of ethnic Armenians. In 1991, Mountainous Karabakh recognized itself as an independent republic but did not get recognition from any state from this time to today. All member states of the United Nations, beside Armenia, recognize Mountainous Karabakh as Azerbaijani territory with ethnic Armenian population. 'Karabakh' is a Turkish-Persian word and it means 'black garden'. Mountainous Karabakh is a part of historical Karabakh and the reason why it had given autonomy, was to underline an ethnic factor of its population. The administrative centre of Karabakh is Khanqend, also known as Stefanakert. The name Stefanakert was called in the respect of Armenian communist, Stafane Shaumian, but Azerbaijanis call it Khanqendi. In this region there are 5 districts, 2 cities and 6 boroughs. Armenians call Mountainous Karabakh 'Artsakh'. Beside Mountainous Karabakh, historical Karabakh included territories in its eastern, western, northern and southern parts and in the newest past, most of this territory was in the composition of Azerbaijani Socialist Republic. Currently, it is in inclusion of Azerbaijanis internationally recognized borders. There is not any exact description of historical Karabakh, although it is known that in the middle centuries, semi-autonomic Karabakh Khanate included approximately 20-25 thousand km² of territories. After the losing of Azerbaijan in Karabakh war, Mountainous Karabakh went under Armenia's control (პიპინაშვილი, დ. 2009: 53).

Currently, Karabakh is disputed territory between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Conclusions from historical documents are very problematic, because both of parties have different historical claims over Karabakh, which makes more difficulties in Azerbaijani-Armenian relations. According to Zurab Davitashvili, the doctor of political science, ethnography of population (the ethnic image of territorial settlements) has been an important factor in Caucasian conflicts. In Caucasus region, ethnic and political-administrative borders do not match each other, which make grounds for ethno-political conflicts. Beside this, ethnic groups, living in a neighborhood, have different language, culture, religion and political orientation. Modern Caucasus is the most unstable region in the world and there are no future perspectives, which would give us any hope. The fact that Caucasus is a border between Christians and Muslims - is enough for political disputes (დავითაშვილი, ზ. 2003: 1). Political, ethnic, economic, ideologic and territorial characters played important role in creating difficulties in these conflicts. South Caucasian conflicts are impeding factors for regional security, stability and cooperation. We should point out the Kremlin role in supporting conflicts and permanent connections with separatists. Moscow supported separatists with military, financial and political aids and it still does everything to impede the involvement of international organizations in South-Caucasian conflicts. Unlike Georgia and Azerbaijan, Armenia's external course was pro-Russian and it remains loyal to this course, which mainly impedes the resolution of ethno-political conflicts in the Caucasus (პიპინაშვილი, დ. 2009: 51, 52).

Historical sources about Mountainous Karabakh are various and confusing. According to the Armenian sources, Karabakh was a part of Armenian Kingdom in 4th century B.C. As for Greek historian Strabo, until 5th century, the recent territory of Azerbaijan was divided between western Armenians and Caucasian Albans. One-third of this territory was settled by western Armenians and the rest was settled by Caucasian Albans, who created their state in the first half of the first millennium. Historical territories, settled by Alban people, conform recent Azerbaijani territories. Caucasus Albania became vassal of Sasanid Empire and existed with this status until 9th century A.D. Azerbaijani historians explain that the local population gained Turkish elements in 7th century A.D., when Selchuk invaders appeared and mixed with Caucasian Albanians. The integration process between them resulted in Transcaucasus population. After Selchuk invaders, Arab invaders appeared in Albanian territories and settled there. Until 14th century, Mountainous-Karabakh was under Arab, Mongolian, Turkish and Safavid domination. In 14th century, Safavid Empire gave autonomy-like status to Mountainous Karabakh and this status was retained during the next four centuries. In the beginning of 18th century, new power, Russia appeared, which limited the Safavid domination. Russia divided Azerbaijan and Armenia into semi-independent khanates. With Baku, Shirvan, Kuba, Shek, Nakhchevan and Erevan khanates, there was the Khanate of Karabakh too (Cornell, S., E. 1999: 2, 3).

When Russian Empire took full control over Caucasus region in 1813, Azerbaijani-Turkish people started leaving of these territories. In contrast to Azerbaijanis, Armenian population in Karabakh started growing. In 1917, after the revolutionary fall of Russian Empire, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia announced independence (1918). Parallel to this, armed conflicts began between Armenians and Azerbaijanis because of disputed territories. On 26 May 1918, in newly independent Armenia, nationalists, called 'Dashnaks', created the government. On 4 June, Dashnaks signed an agreement with Turkey, by which Armenia recognized borders which existed until 1878 between Russia and Osman Empire, so western Armenian territories became part of Turkey. During this period, Armenians occupied Giumri and Kars, started dispute over Mountainous Karabakh, had short-time wars with Georgia because of Lore district, which recently belongs to Armenia (პიპინაშვილი, დ. 2009: 54). In 1920, Azerbaijani revolutionary committee announced, under the Soviet pressure that Zangezur, Karabakh and Nakhchevan were given to Armenia, but after the signing of 'Brotherhood and Friendship Agreement' between the Soviet Union and Turkey, Nakhchevan and Karabakh were given back to Azerbaijan Socialist Republic. In 1924, Mountainous Karabakh was granted autonomous oblast status and administrative centre from Shusha moved to Khanqend. Also, Nakhchevan became autonomous oblast within Azerbaijani Socialist Republic borders. The status of Nakhchevan was agreed after the discussions of Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey. Armenians, who had a promise from Soviet authorities – were disappointed (Cornell, S., E 1999: 9, 10, 11). After the territorial changes in 20s, Armenia lost Nakhchevan and Karabakh, although it gained control over Lore province, which was disputed territory between Georgia and Armenia. During the Soviet period, an ethnic composition of Armenia's population significantly changed, which was

partly conditioned by ethnic Azerbaijanis intensive immigration and Armenians repatriation from abroad. As a result, from 1926 to 1989, the quantity of Armenian population in Karabakh region increased from 70% to 93%. Because of the conflict, Azerbaijanis moved to Azerbaijan from Armenia and Armenians moved back to Armenia from Azerbaijan (დავითაშვილი, ზ. 2001: 2, 3). In 1930, Armenians attempted to regain control over Karabakh and Nakhchevan. In 1936, one of the Armenian leaders renewed the issue of Mountainous Karabakh and this person was killed in the same year. In 1963, approximately 2,500 Karabakh Armenians made a petition for Khrushchev, in which Armenians claimed that Azerbaijan was economically ignoring Mountainous-Karabakh. Moscow had not any reaction to this petition. Armenians were criticizing and accusing the government of Azerbaijan in creating regional destabilization. Also, there were many efforts to unify Mountainous Karabakh with Armenia. For this, Armenian part actively used nationalist propaganda (Cornell, S., E. 1999: 12). After the sovietization, unlike other South Caucasian republics, Azerbaijan was in more privileged conditions, because almost all of its disputed territories with neighbor republics moved in its boundaries, including Karabakh and Nakhchevan. Nakhchevan has not territorial ties with Azerbaijan. As for Azerbaijanis, as an ethnic entity they were formed in the Soviet era. The term ‘Azerbaijani’ was firstly used by the Soviet Union authority during the census of Soviet population. They were called Turkish or Tatar people before (დავითაშვილი, ზ. 2001: 2).

In 1987, Armenian science academy prepared a petition with hundreds of thousand signatures and asked for the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchevan to the Armenian SSR. On October, violence started in Azerbaijani village Chardakli, in which most of the population is ethnic Armenian and the reason was the nomination of an Azerbaijani director in this Armenian village – Armenians refused to accept ethnic Azerbaijani director in their village. The Chardakli event reached to Yerevan, where demonstrations against pollution were holding and demonstrators were asking for the closure of polluting industries. In response to Chardakli events, Armenians forced Azerbaijanis living in Armenia to leave the country and move to Azerbaijan. In 1988, the first refugee wave reached Baku. On February 10, Azerbaijani Information Agency declared that Azerbaijan would never give Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. On February 21, tensions which started in Yerevan as ecological demonstrations – turned into irredentism. On this issue, Gorbachev met two leaders of Karabakh Committee in Moscow and asked for a month moratorium on demonstration, however, when the committee returned to Yerevan, they told the crowd that Armenians triumphed. On February 26, rumors about Azerbaijanis death reached to Agdam, an Azerbaijani city, located near Karabakh’s eastern border. Azerbaijani crowd moved to the NKAO border and clashes between demonstrators and police resulted in two dead Azerbaijanis. One was killed by a stone and one by an Azerbaijani policeman (Cornell, S., E. 1999: 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17). In February 1988, mass protests started in Stepanakert and protests on the Karabakh issue quickly spread outside of the region. Under massive pressure from demonstrators, legislators in Stepanakert voted and formally requested to transfer Karabakh to Armenian jurisdiction. In the end of February, 2000 Azerbaijani refugees from Karabakh were displaced into Azerbaijani city of Sumgait. The violence resulted in an

official death of 31. In 1989, Azerbaijani Popular Front called for a series of trikes including a railway blockade of Armenia. Paralel to this, Armenians attacked on trains going from Azerbaijan through Armeniato Nakhchevan. The blockade continued as de facto. The governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia opposed violence and tried to prevent and stop it. Armenian guerillas in Zangezur were attacking Azerbaijani train crews and continuing railway blockade of Armenia (Kaufman, S. 1996: 163). After the collapse of the Soviet Union relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia worsened. Until 1991, Mountainous Karabakh was a little isolated region with aoutonomous oblast status within Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1992, Mountainous Karabakh declared itself as independent republic, which resulted in armed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Armenia occupied Mountainous Karabakh and its surrounding area. More than half million ethnic Azerbaijanis were forced to leave their homes (Klever, E. 2013: 4). In February 1992, the Russian government escalated war at Khodjali, from guerilla fighting to conventional combat between armies (Kaufman, S. 1996: 166).

Main Part

The OSCE Minsk Group created in 1992, which suggested talk formats for Azerbaijan and Armenia in order to solve conflict. The OSCE Minsk Group became the main political body concerned with finding a solution for the Mountainous Karabakh conflict. The Minsk Group has three main objectives: 1) providing an appropriate framework for conflict resolution 2) ceasefire agreement and organizing the Minsk Conference 3) promoting the peace process by deploying peacekeeping forces. In 2007, OSCE Ministerial Council in Madrid, the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, including ambassadors of Russia, France and the United States, formally presented a set of Basic Principles for the Peaceful Settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Madrid Principles are based on Helsinki Final Act principles of: Non-Use of Force, Territorial Integrity, Equal Rights and peoples Self-Determination. Only 6 of 14 have been agreed and are made public: return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance; a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh; future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally; binding expression of will; the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation (Klever, E. 2013: 5). Despite of many warnings, war between Azerbaijan and Armenia renewed on 2-5 April 2016. Unexpectedly began war turned into history as four-day war, which ended on 5 April. It is interesting that on 2 April, when war between parties was beginning, both countries presidents were in the United States and they were taking part in Nuclear Security Summit. On 3 April, president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan became forced to respond Armenian party, because OSCE Minsk Group had not reached any progress in talks. Official representative of Azerbaijan explained that the reason that conditioned the war was provocations from Armenian soldiers during years and Azerbaijan responded to this. On 6 April in Moscow, Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a ceasefire agreement. After four-day war,

Azerbaijan returned a small part of territories, occupied by Armenia. Despite of agreements between parties, controversies on the cease line never stopped. Four-day war became the bloodiest war after 1994. According to the US State Department, after four-day war both parties lost 350 military and civil persons. A small-scale conflict occurred on August 2014, but it was settled down with Russia's intervention (ՀրմՅԵՅՈՍ, Թ. 2016: 3, 4). As it seems, after 1991-1994 war, self-confidence in both parties grew. Azerbaijan, as Caspian gas and oil exporter state, became more self-confident because it increased export of natural resources. Armenia was in the same position, because it had military security alliance with Russia. The main reason of renewed conflict was de facto border between Armenia-controlled territory and Azerbaijan. It is called 'contact line' and differs from de facto borders of Transnistria, Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region. Contact line divides 20,000 powerful armies from each other. Crossing and conducting of diplomatic activities in this area are very rare. Western part of contact line is internationally recognized border between two countries. Confrontations took place there too in 2014-2015 and several civilians died. In 2014, the number of victims decreased to 30 and it was conditioned by some factors: both parties expanded their military capabilities, changed military goals and negotiations marginalized (Broers, L. 2016: 4, 5).

The European Union has its policy with Armenia and Azerbaijan – European Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership. The aim of these policies is to strengthen prosperity, stability and security in the neighbor countries of the EU. Subsequently, resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is in the interest of the European Union. The European Neighborhood Policy focuses on enhancing the relationship with Eastern European and Southern Caucasus countries through Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Trade Agreements. The EU has delegations in Baku and Yerevan since 2008 and they cooperate with delegations of Azerbaijani and Armenian parliaments. The EU prioritizes and fully supports the Minsk Group and its work. As for the Council of Europe, this organization is not directly involved in the resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In 1994, Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) adopted a resolution and called for support for the OSCE Minsk Group. In 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2010, the Committee of Ministers or PACE members asked the self-declared Nagorno-Karabakh government not to hold elections. In 2005, PACE called parties for complying with UN resolutions on the conflict by refraining from any armed hostilities and withdrawing military forces from any occupied territories. Resolutions over the Karabakh conflict are also adopted by the United Nations. The UN Security Council adopted four resolutions in 1993. On 14 March 2008, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolutions after its finding mission ended in 2005. With these resolutions, the UN called for respecting the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and demanded the withdrawal of Armenian forces from all occupied territories. The European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is an initiative of European civil societies and aims transforming of Karabakh conflict with peacebuilding. For this, European civil societies work on large-scale programs and projects with local partners in South Caucasus. There are three main working areas: media initiatives and balancing of media broadcasting in order to reduce barriers which impede conflict resolution; involvement of groups, which are

related to conflict, in the process of conflict resolution; creating of inclusive and effective political conditions through the facilitation in order to support negotiations between parties. In August 2012 and February 2013, two meetings were held between the European Movement International, the European Movement Armenia, the European Movement Azerbaijan and the European Movement Georgia in Tbilisi and Batumi. Meetings were hosted by European Movement Georgia. These meetings resulted in two declarations, which prove that parties are agreed on future discussions to change their visions and opinions about Karabakh conflict (Klever, E. 2013: 6, 7, 8, 10).

Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh is a clash of political ambitions. Positions of parties still exclude each other. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, the improvement of peace process will be impossible, if Mountainous Karabakh does not fully participate in negotiations as a party. The position of Armenia is that for the conflict settlement: Nagorno-Karabakh people's right of self-determination must be recognized; Nagorno-Karabakh should have uninterrupted land communication with Armenia and under the Armenian side's jurisdiction; the security of Nagorno-Karabakh should be internationally guaranteed. Armenian side explains that as a part of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh has not future and whatever is the solution, the most important is the will of Karabakh people. 'Azerbaijan has neither legal nor political or moral grounds to claim over Nagorno-Karabakh' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan has different position. Azerbaijani side describes Karabakh conflict with Armenian terrorism, provocations and genocide of Azerbaijani people by Armenians. There are many accusations of Armenian side in Azerbaijani official documents. Azerbaijan blames Armenia in ethnic Azerbaijanis genocide in Khodzjali, Azerbaijani region, with 613 victims. Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry talks about Armenian aggression, which damaged Azerbaijanis economically and made socio-psychological problems for ethnic Azerbaijani population. Also industrial, residential, social and agricultural facilities damaged in this region. There were vandalistic activities too. In 2016, Azerbaijani side faced provocations from Armenian side, which took both sides to military confrontation. The position of Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution is the same of Minsk Group – respecting of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, returning of refugees and peaceful conflict resolution (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan).

Major research

The fact that conflict in Mountainous Karabakh was mass-led is pointed out by the professor of political science and international relations – Stuart Kaufman. Kaufman has analyzed regional conflicts of Yugoslavia, Moldova and Azerbaijan. He suggests that conflict in Mountainous Karabakh is mass-led. Historical facts are enough to define the grounds of conflict and who or what supported its escalation. For example, nationalistic movements were on both sides, but none of them had supports from governments. Moreover, governments of both sides attempted to prevent extremist activities. The government of Azerbaijan negatively reacted on the blockade of Armenian railway by Azerbaijani People Front and immediately broke this.

Armenian side used all levers too and tried to restrain the crowd of Armenian nationalists at Yerevan airport. The Soviet Russia was purposefully trying to link the creating of security dilemma in Azerbaijanis to the information of ‘RadioBaku’, which informed people about the death of two young Azerbaijanis (Kaufman, S. 1996: 164). Using of media as a way for creating an ethnic violence is mostly used by elites, subsequently, Soviet Russia’s main goal was to distort the exact interpretation of conflict. We should point out that a security dilemma had already been existed in opposing parties until the Radio Baku spreaded the information. Also, after the February events, leaders of both republics changed and this would not happen in case the Karabakh conflict was elite-led and aimed expanding of elites’ power. After the defining of who leded the conflict, lets analyze conflict reasons and what created the security dilemma. Zurab Davitashvili, professor in the sphere of social and political science, describes several factors that generated the conflict:

Geographical factor – Caucasus region with its strategic location always was desirable territory for different empires. Subsequently, creating of political difficulties here is very easy.

Ethnographic factor – the territorial arrangement of population played important role in Caucasian conflicts. Caucasus is a diverse region and political, social-economic and cultural problems here gains ethnic forms. In Caucasus, political-administrative borders almost nowhere match ethnic borders.

Factor of nationalism – nationalism is a major source of Caucasian conflicts. Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, also Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossethian were not avoidable, because national ideologies and visions about the model of statehood of these peoples differ from each other (დავითაშვილი, ზ. 2001: 1, 7). Armenian nationalists, Dashnaks, started ethnic and religious cleansing of Azerbaijanis and generally Muslim people. This fact activated nationalistic movements in Azerbaijan. Armenian nationalism became more active after the Soviet Union gave Karabakh to Armenia and soon took it away (Cornell, S., E. 1999: 9, 10).

Factor of Russia – if not Russia, one handful of separatists would not bring conflict to this level (დავითაშვილი, ზ. 2001: 1, 7). Russia, apparently or secretly, was supporting conflict escalation. For example, when massive demonstrations took place in Armenia, Gorbachev adviser noted in French media that Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh should be given to Armenia - this statement made Armenian nationalists more active (Cornell, S., E. 1999: 12).

Factor of ethnic affinity – both sides, Azerbaijanis and Armenians, had different histories of domination in this region and because of this, very soon, Karabakh became symbolic issue. Stereotypes were made on confronted sides and their claims over Karabakh territory grew into the ethnic war (Kaufman, S. 1996: 163).

Factor of historical sources – there are different visions of conflict in both sides. Armenians study, that this region is their historical property, while Azerbaijanis prove opposite. Both sides have a sense that this territory belongs to them and their claims are perceived as an attempt of

wresting the Karabakh territory – this factor had a huge impact in creating stereotypes between parties (Cornell, S., E. 1999: 3).

Economic factor – some scholars relate Karabakh conflict to the 1980s economic crisis of the Soviet Union (Waal, T. 2005: 15). Svante Cornell explains that demonstrators in Mountainous Karabakh had economic claims. In 1963, Armenians in Karabakh protested an economic ignore of Mountainous Karabakh by Azerbaijani central government (Cornell, S., E. 1999: 12).

Security dilemma, which resulted in ethnic war, was created by several historical facts: Genocide of Armenians in 1915, the assassination of Armenian nationalist in 1936, Chardakli events in 1987 and the assassination of Stefanakert delegation member, Valery Grigoryan in 1991. After the Armenian genocide in 1915, ethnic Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh had fears of ethnic extinction, which appeared in Karabakh conflict as an aggressive nationalism. The assassination of Armenian nationalist in 1936, took place after the accusing of the Soviet authorities on the Karabakh issue by some Armenian nationalists. This fact made conflict more acute. Chardakli events in 1987 started with demonstrations of Armenians in Azerbaijan. Armenians in Yerevan joined to this demonstration. In 1991, the member of Stefanakert delegation, Valery Grigoryan, visited Baku with other members of the delegation. In the same year, when he returned to Nagorno-Karabakh, he was killed.

In Conclusion

It is interesting, what levers can be used for the resolution of conflict, which exists more than decades and is the main obstacle in Azerbaijani-Armenian relations. Unfortunately, until the recent period, there was no any serious progress. Because of great difficulties and complexity, the engagement of international organizations is necessary. Parties, Azerbaijan and Armenia, do not talk each other without mediators or facilitators, so third neutral party is essential. The Minsk Group includes international organizations and mediator states, but how non-destructive mediator is Russia – is other important issue for discussion. International organizations, such as OSCE and the European Union, should continue engagement in conflict resolution and effectively do their work. The development of institutions between ethnically divided societies is also necessary. Effective institutions, such as civil sector and non-governmental organizations, can solve ethnic conflicts. The development of open and democratic civil society in conflict region is a precondition of peaceful conflict resolution. Youth projects are important too. Special projects for youth are necessary for overcoming the stereotypes on both sides.

Conflict in Mountainous Karabakh, as other south Caucasian conflicts, is a respond to the geographical, ethnographic, social, economic and political composition of this region. Political interests of powerful empires divided ethnically diversified population and created stereotypes in people. Russia still supports separatistic movements in Caucasus and has the most important role in the escalation of south Caucasian conflicts.

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