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CIA/ONE/STAFF MEM/37-68

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

24 June 1963

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 37-63



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SUBJECT: Khrushchev's Comeback

NOTE TO THE BOARD

This memorandum was prepared on the initiative of EE Staff, and is distributed for the information of the Board. Its main points will be incorporated into the draft of a forthcoming CIA assessment of current problems and pressures confronting Khrushchev.

H. STOERTZ

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SUBJECT: Khrushchev's Comeback

SUMMARY

A. Anticipating success for his Cuban venture, Khrushchev during the early fall of 1962 appeared to be laying the groundwork for a number of major political and economic initiatives. It became apparent soon after the Central Committee plenum in November, however, that his plans were being effectively stymied both by circumstances, in the form of a series of difficult problems which faced him in the wake of Cuba, and politics, in the form of a dubious and probably obstinate Presidium. By February and March, his career seemed to have reached a post-1957 lowpoint; either because he was convinced by a generally discouraging trend of events or because he had little choice but to acced

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to a dominant, conservative, perhaps Kozlovian view then prevailing in the Presidium, he gave every evidence of being a man in retreat.

B. Since mid-April or so, however, Khrushchev appears to have been very much on the move, reasserting both the style of his personal leadership and the content of his traditional policies. And the recently concluded plenum of the Central Committee seems to have set the seal on his resurgence, which, at least in retrospect, appears to date in the main from the time of Kozlov's last public appearance on 10 April. In any event, his ability to come back after a series of policy failures and a period of probably great political tension, even if in part the result of good luck (Kozlov's illness), is testimony both to the inherent advantages of his position and to his skill in coping with resistance. It would now appear less likely than ever that Khrushchev will be seriously challenged by any of his colleagues in the foreseeable future.

C. Nevertheless, a great many unresolved foreign and domestic issues will confront the Soviet leadership. The debate with the Chinese is approaching a climax; problems in and with Eastern Europe are growing; and foreign policy as a whole seems to be in a state

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of relative immobility. At home, the question of resource allocation is still probably the subject of some debate, and no doubt will continue to be for some time to come. Certain doctrinal issues with strong political overtones still seem to be subject to some controversy. And, in the area of cultural policy and the proper approach to the era of Stalin, uncertainty and disagreement is no doubt widespread. But on most of these fields, Khrushchev is once again setting the dominant tone and providing the party with guidelines for action which are consistent with his traditional methods and policies. Further, as would seem to be demonstrated by the recent naming of Brezhnev and Podgorny to the secretariate, he appears to be in firm control of party personnel appointments.

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"I have a magnificent impression of Comrade Khrushchev He is extraordinarily human He has an extraordinary mental energy, and a complete, complete, complete mental lucidity without a doubt one of the most brilliant intellects that I have ever known a militant revolutionary a veritable authority on economic problems There exists [in the Soviet leadership] a spirit of collective discussion; yet amidst this . . . one is quite aware of Khrushchev's authority and prestige in the collective management"

--Fidel Castro, Havana, 4 June 1963

1. A variety of recent signs, not the least of which is cited above, suggests that Khrushchev is well on the road to political recovery. We have estimated that Khrushchev suffered a decline in preeminence during the winter and early spring, partly as a result of a "conservative consensus" among his top colleagues; but we have also estimated that his temperament is not "amenable to collectivity" and that he was likely to move again in order to reassert his dominance. * Recent developments in domestic politics,

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the economy, and ideology tend, we think, to confirm both of these judgments. Since perhaps mid-April or so, Khrushchev appears to have been very much the man on the move, reasserting both the style of his personal leadership and the content of his traditional policies. And the recently concluded plenum of the Central Committee seems to have set the seal on his resurgence.

2. There follows a more or less chronological review of some of the principal signs of Khrushchev's political malaise of last winter and manifestations of his recovery during the spring. A number of perhaps relevant developments in the military area, including some personnel changes, the Fenkovsky case, and disputes over doctrine, and the general air of uncertainty in foreign affairs, are not specifically examined here. But they have been taken into account, and do not appear to contradict the general trend of domestic events. The focus of this paper is thus concentrated mainly on those factors -- including Kozlov, chemistry, culture, Castro, and the consumer -- which seem most clearly to have played at least a symptomatic role in Khrushchev's recent fall and rise.*

* This criterion -- clarity -- precludes another area of examination, viz. certain possible indications of high-level political infighting, such as the listings of Presidium member Kirilenko out of alphabetical order by some Soviet newspapers. Infighting almost certainly exists and may be reflected in this esoteric way, but such evidence is usually more intriguing than it is conclusive.

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3. Anticipating success for his Cuban venture, Khrushchev in the early fall seemed to be laying the groundwork for a number of major political and economic initiatives. The alleged discovery of a Lenin statement which stressed the primacy of economics over politics was intended in part to establish the doctrinal framework for structural changes in party and state management of the economy. And the burgeoning anti-Stalin (and anti-Stalinist) campaign, high-lighted by Khrushchev's decision to publish Solzhenitsyn's novel, One Day and Yevtushenko's poem, "Stalin Heirs", may have been intended to set the stage for a number of political changes, including, perhaps, a shakeup of the top leadership.

4. Despite the failure in Cuba, Khrushchev appears in the main to have gotten his way at the plenum of the Central Committee held in November. His plans for a reorganization of the party along functional (industrial and agricultural) lines and his proposals concerning changes in top state economic organs were for the most part adopted by the plenum. His economic plans, particularly his emphasis on the need to give greater priority to agriculture and to the chemical industry (and less to the steel industry), both areas of prime interest to the consumer, were also endorsed, though

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probably not in full. And his political plans, while still obscure, may have been reflected in part by the plenum's decision to expand the party Secretariat, establish a number of new top party bureaus as overseers of specific economic areas, and create a new control commission (headed by Khrushchev's protege, Shelepin) to ride herd on both party and state bureaucracies. All of these moves could have facilitated an attempt by Khrushchev to increase his power at the expense of that still exercised by his senior colleagues on the Presidium.

5. It became apparent soon after the November plenum, however, that Khrushchev's plans were being effectively stymied by a combination of: concern stimulated by the Cuban crisis; confusion occasioned by the various reorganizations; turmoil provoked by the destalinization campaign; and political resistance evoked by the functional split in the party, the new doctrinal emphasis on economics, and Khrushchev's apparent efforts at aggrandizement. His prestige already badly damaged by a number of policy failures, and his own self-confidence no doubt badly shaken, Khrushchev did not react positively. The combination of circumstance, in the form of a series of problems which confronted him in the wake of Cuba, and politics, in the form of a dubious and probably obstinate Presidium, seemed to be too much for him.

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6. Thereafter, in December and January, Khrushchev's programs seemed to be subject to a process of unsystematic undoing. The anti-Stalin campaign was abandoned; the party and state reorganization appeared to be floundering; the new party bureaus remained relatively inactive; the party-state control commission was given fewer powers over party organs than it was apparently initially intended to receive; and plans for greater emphasis on agriculture and the chemical industry were placed in abeyance. By February and March, Khrushchev's career seemed to reach a post-1957 lowpoint. Either because he was convinced by the arguments of his colleagues and by the generally discouraging trend of events, or because he had little choice but to accede to the dominant view than prevailing in the Presidium, he gave every evidence during these two months of being a man in retreat.

7. Khrushchev's speech to his Moscow constituents on 27 February, in which he spoke of the need to spend "enormous" sums on "military might", seemed to reflect his general discouragement. It offered the Soviet people little in the way of praise for past performances and virtually nothing in the way of future promises. In contrast, Kozlov, speaking in Leningrad only the day before, hailed both the USSR's glorious successes and remarkable prospects and described Soviet society as the "brightest and most joyous

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on earth." Kozlov (at one time a metallurgist) seemed to give only grudging and qualified approval to Khrushchev's plans for the chemical industry and called for large new investments in the machine building industry, (a pitch which was to be specifically disallowed by Khrushchev in April, of which more later). Throughout this period, Kozlov was very much in evidence and his statements and travels were well publicized in the Soviet press.

8. Next, on 8 March, Khrushchev addressed the writers. It could not have been an easy task, for in the process of insisting on artistic conformity, he was forced to recant in two very sensitive areas of policy. In effect, he repudiated his own cultural policy of some years standing, i.e. minimal party interference in the arts and at least tacit permission for the appearance of literary works more realist than socialist. And he drastically revised his previous assessments of Stalin and his era, paid tribute to Stalin's merits and services, and, in effect, reversed the anti-Stalin campaign inaugurated by him only a few months before.

9. The next blow to Khrushchev's prestige, and perhaps his power, apparently came on 13 March. A joint meeting of the party Presidium and the Council of Ministers decided on that day to establish a Supreme National Economic Council provided with all the

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"necessary rights and powers for the solution of the questions connected with the work of industry and construction, and for insuring the successful fulfillment of state plans." The new organ, subordinate to the Council of Ministers, "gives orders and instructions which must be carried out by all state bodies irrespective of their subordination."

10. This act was somewhat unusual in several respects. It was made without any prior public warning whatsoever; indeed, a speech made by the top Soviet planning official only ten days beforehand clearly indicated that even this official had not been forewarned. Further, it is highly unusual to convene the Presidium and the Council of Ministers for such purposes; normally, a decision of this magnitude publicly involves the Central Committee as a whole. Finally, there has been remarkably little public comment on the new Council; neither the Soviet press nor the leaders have devoted much space or time to an examination of its functions or, as would seem to be in order, an extollment of its virtues. Khrushchev himself avoided comment until late April, and then his remarks were notably unenthusiastic. Indeed, they included some direct criticism of the performance of the Council's new chief, Ustinov, in his previous job (running the nation's defense industries).

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11. The establishment of the new Council also appeared to contradict both the spirit and the letter of the decisions made at Khrushchev's behest by the Central Committee plenum the previous November. First of all, it seemed to shift emphasis away from greater party control and management of the economy; inter alia, the head of the new Council was not a high-level party figure, nor was he a protege of Khrushchev's (though he may have been one of Kozlov's). Secondly, it concentrated in this man's hands all the powers previously assigned by the November plenum to the heads of the three top state economic organs (the planning council, the construction council, and the national economic council). Finally, and in complete contradiction of the injunction of Khrushchev, it gave to these three organs authority over comparable bodies in the union republics.* The whole episode reminded a number of observers (probably including some in the USSR) of a previous period in Soviet history when Khrushchev's plans for decentralization were temporarily thwarted by the anti-party group. At a low point in

* Khrushchev, addressing the plenum on 19 November, declared that in order to carry to its logical conclusion the responsibility of the republics for the management of national economy and its planning, it is necessary to make planning and the implementation of plans fully the tasks of the republics, their Gosplans and sovnarkhozes. (underscoring ours)

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Khrushchev's career in December 1956, this group succeeded in pushing through a plan to create a central economic organ very similar to the Supreme Council, a move subsequently rescinded by Khrushchev.

12. Khrushchev left Moscow on 14 March, the day after he chaired the meeting which established the Supreme Council. He apparently needed a change of scene and an opportunity to publicize some of his own convictions. Accordingly, heading south, he toured a number of chemical plants and advertised the notion he had so strongly expressed in November that the development of the chemical industry should be accelerated. "This question," Khrushchev had said then, "deserves to be discussed again at the next plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU." But while Khrushchev was vacationing on the Black Sea, it was announced in Moscow on 9 April that the next plenum of the Central Committee would concern itself with ideology.

13. On the previous day, Pravda had published the party slogans for May Day; the one concerning Yugoslavia failed to reflect Khrushchev's view of this country's status as a socialist country and, in effect, contradicted the statement made on this point in the CPSU letter of 30 March to the Communist Party of China, a

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letter which bore the signs of Khrushchev's authorship. Only a week before, all of the top members of the Presidium except Khrushchev had assembled in Moscow, ostensibly to entertain a delegation from the Communist Party of France. Given the timing and the fact that there is no precedent for such an assembly in Khrushchev's absence, together with past signs that Kozlov had been, at best, lukewarm about the USSR's rapprochement with Yugoslavia, it is at least tempting to conclude that these leaders had reviewed the May Day slogans and that, in the process, Khrushchev had either been outvoted or ignored.

14. It was apparent during this entire period, February and March, that a series of interrelated problems were agitating the Soviet leadership. It became so obvious, in fact, that rumors were rife of Khrushchev's imminent political demise and both Italian and Yugoslav Communists alluded publicly to controversy within the leadership. The Italian statements were apparently prompted in part by the then impending general elections and the desire of the CPI to disassociate itself from the increasingly harsh cultural line emerging in Moscow. But no such motive impelled the Yugoslav correspondent in Moscow, F. Barbieri, who wrote on 10 April that the Soviets were engaged in "debates on foreign policies" and

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"controversies and struggles" over the allocation of resources, and who implied, in general, that the Soviet leadership was in a state of disagreement and disarray.

15. Barbieri, who can be fairly characterized as a knowledgeable observer, claimed that "external factors" (which he blamed on US) had led to an increase in Soviet military investments and this, in turn, had produced a whole complex of internal problems. Thus, he wrote, large investments in agriculture planned for 1962 and 1963 were reduced; difficulties were encountered in the effort to expand the chemical industry, which was supposed to become the basis for industrial modernization and a faster rate of growth in living standards; and "conflicts" between the "old and the new ways of Soviet development", as exemplified by the competition for resources between the chemical and metallurgical industries, were intensified. Barbieri did not identify Khrushchev as the leader who had favored agriculture and the chemical industry and who had been highly critical of the "metal eaters", but did note that the formation of the Supreme National Economic Council ran counter to the decisions of the November plenum.

The Ascent

16. If Khrushchev left Moscow under a cloud in mid-March, the sun had broken through by the time of his official return on

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or about 20 April. In this connection, it would seem to be more than mere coincidence that Kozlov, who may have been the leader of conservative forces in the Presidium, made his last public appearance on 10 April at the first session of a meeting of artists in Moscow; he failed to attend the second session convened two days later. He thus was probably stricken on the 10th or 11th. In any event, it was announced on the 11th that the May Day slogan concerning Yugoslavia had been revised and it now repeated Khrushchev's formula used in the letter to the Chinese.

17. On 17 April, Pravda seemingly prepared for Khrushchev's impending arrival with a panegyric reviewing a collection of his speeches entitled "A Major Contribution to the Theory and Practice of Communist Construction." Referring to Khrushchev as "that true Leninist" who heads the Communist Party and its Central Committee, the editorial claimed that the publication of Khrushchev's works constituted a "significant event in the life of our party and the country." It hailed the 22nd Party Congress, quite clearly identified as Khrushchev's own, as comparable to Lenin's 2nd and 8th Congresses and as "the most outstanding event in the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the whole world Communist and workers movement." Throughout the article, emphasis was placed on the wisdom and success of such traditional Khrushchev policies as

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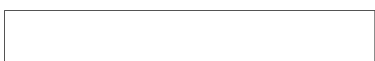


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priority for agriculture, the need for material incentives, and the "welfare of man."*

18. This apparent revival of concern for the consumer was echoed three days later in a small, front-page item in Izvestia which announced a decision of the Supreme National Economic Council to increase by one billion rubles the planned production of consumers goods in 1963. This, as far as we know, was the first time that a decision of the Supreme Council had been announced. Pravda, commenting on 16 March on the decision to establish the Council, had stressed the value of the new body in terms of such matters as construction activity, the introduction of new machines, and the strengthening of state discipline; it did not refer to the production of consumers goods at all. Thus, in his first public move, the armaments expert Ustinov, who had been named to head an agency responsible mainly for the direction of heavy

* Both the tone and the contents of a Pravda article which appeared on 13 February and which dealt with the publication of earlier volumes in the Khrushchev series were of an entirely different nature. Praise was extraordinarily reserved and substance was surrounded by qualifiers. Even the title, compared to that of the April article, was non-committal: "On the Crash Front of Communist Construction."



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industry and construction, found himself identified with jar tops and soda siphons (two of the items named in Izvestia). This looked very much like the work of Khrushchev.

19. Khrushchev's speech of 24 April to construction and industrial workers, in which he alluded to his eventual retirement, was notable in several other respects. Much of it was bitter, as was in a sense his election speech in February, but in this instance his bitterness was demanding rather than defensive. In a sense, he seemed to be roasting those who had ruled during his "absence"; he lamented the sorry state of affairs in economic management, insisted that something be done about it, and criticized the heads of the top economic organs by name (including Ustinov). He reiterated his belief in the virtues of the chemical industry and announced, cryptically, that the Central Committee had decided to convene a plenum at some unspecified date to deal with this subject. Finally, he rebutted an opinion concerning the machine building industry expressed by Kozlov in February.* The

* Kozlov, speaking in Leningrad on 26 February, had called for the investment of "huge funds" in the construction of new machine building enterprises. Khrushchev said that such new enterprises should, of course, continue to be built but that it is "considerably more profitable" to invest in new equipment so as to facilitate a transfer to two-shift work in existing enterprises. He claimed that the latter procedure would bring twice the return per ruble of investment.

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speech as a whole, while not of the character which could be fairly described as typical of Khrushchev in all its substance, nevertheless appeared in the main to be another sign of resurgence.

20. This at least partial return to Khrushchevian economics was confirmed on 4 June when Pravda announced that the Premier had made a number of proposals concerning "basic principles and approaches for drafting the economic plan for 1964-65 and following years." Khrushchev stressed the need for a "fundamental revision" in planning and said that the chemical industry should be the chief beneficiary of such a revision. Consumers' goods, agriculture, and industry (in that order) would benefit in turn. Pravda noted that the Council of Ministers meeting which heard these proposals was also attended by a variety of representatives from the party, the union republics, and top central economic organs, but made no reference to anyone present from the Supreme National Economic Council.

21. The announcement in late April that Castro had accepted the Soviet Premier's personal invitation to visit the USSR seemed to be yet another sign of Khrushchev's political comeback and, in this context, Castro's subsequent Soviet tour almost certainly proved to be a great boon. Castro's implicit endorsement of the

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Soviet position in the Sino-Soviet dispute, his specific sanction of the USSR's Cuban policy, and his high praise of Khrushchev personally all served to buttress Khrushchev's prestige. If nothing else, Castro provided Khrushchev with an opportunity to demonstrate his status as Number One and to appear before the public in a favorable light. Moreover, it must have occurred to Soviet party members that Castro would scarcely have returned to Havana and responded to Khrushchev with such notable enthusiasm if he had had any serious doubts about Khrushchev's political future.

22. A Khrushchevian comeback could also be seen in events associated with the then forthcoming Central Committee Plenum on ideology. Initially scheduled for late May, it was announced on 14 May that this meeting had been postponed to mid-June. (For reasons which remain obscure, the decision was alleged to have been made on 3 May, one day after the official announcement of Kozlov's illness.) More important, this decision was accompanied by signs that the party's strident campaign against recalcitrant writers had been considerably toned down and that the subject matter to be considered by the plenum had been greatly broadened. Publicity preceding the meeting addressed itself to such topics as the

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education of the "new Communist man", the moral and political decline of the capitalist West, and the need for ideology to spur increases in labor productivity.

23. In any event, the great cultural crackdown feared by the writers in March now seems less likely. Kozlov's illness may have been partly responsible for this; the liberal writers believe that he had been the champion of "Stalinist" authors and was largely responsible for the harsh campaign against non-conformity. Whatever the reasons, Ilichev, in his speech to the plenum (which, among other things, was highly laudatory of Khrushchev) assured his listeners that there would be no return to Stalinist methods in the struggle against literary "rubbish." Despite continuing emphasis on the impermissibility of "ideological coexistence" with the West and the probability that some further measures will be taken to strengthen the party's influence and control over the writers, cultural policy now seems to be returning partially to the more traditional Khrushchev approach; hands off the intellectuals insofar as possible, partly because the liberals at times serve Khrushchev's political purposes, partly because Khrushchev would ordinarily prefer to avoid the storms created both at home and abroad by direct moves against the liberals.

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24. A great many unresolved foreign and domestic issues still confront the Soviet leadership. The debate with the Chinese is approaching a climax; problems in and with Eastern Europe are growing; and foreign policy as a whole seems to be in a state of relative immobility. At home, the question of resource allocation is still probably the subject of some debate, and no doubt will continue to be for some time to come. Certain doctrinal issues with strong political overtones still seem to be subject to some controversy. The question of "economics vs. politics", for example, has been revived along Khrushchevian lines, but in a somewhat confused and contentious manner. And, in the area of cultural policy and the proper approach to the era of Stalin, uncertainty and disagreement is no doubt widespread. But in most of these fields, Khrushchev is once again setting the dominant tone and providing the party with guidelines for action which are consistent with his traditional methods and policies. Further, as would seem to be demonstrated by the recent naming of Brezhnev and Podgorny to the secretariat, he appears to be in firm control of party personnel appointments.

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25. Through precisely what means Khrushchev was able to reassert his dominance after a period of great difficulty may never be known to us. It appears on the surface, however, that the disappearance of Kozlov from the political scene was of crucial importance; in retrospect at least, Khrushchev's resurgence seems to date in the main from the time of Kozlov's last public appearance. And this must be taken together with a variety of signs (some of which, not specifically alluded to in this paper, go back a number of years) indicating that Kozlov disagreed with his boss on a number of important issues.

26. During February and March, Khrushchev was, at a minimum, fighting a rearguard action to save his political and economic programs. Whether he was also involved in a struggle for his political life is not at all clear. His colleagues, with the possible exception of Kozlov, would probably be quite reluctant to extend policy disputes into the area of Khrushchev's personal position in the party and government. Khrushchev, after all, has had years in which to extend his reins of authority and to establish his image as the indispensable leader. In any event, however, Khrushchev's ability to come back after a series of policy failures and after a period of probably great political tension, even if in

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part the result of good luck (Kozlov's illness), is certainly testimony to the man's skill in coping with resistance.

27. It would now appear to be less likely than ever that Khrushchev will be seriously challenged by any of his colleagues in the foreseeable future; even the Chinese, who for some time have entertained hopes of Khrushchev's removal, now seem to have given up on the idea and to be addressing themselves to the errors of the Soviet party as a whole. Thus the next crisis in the Soviet leadership may come only after Khrushchev's death. But the implications of this most recent crisis strongly suggest that the struggle for power among his heirs will be a fierce one which will not necessarily be won by the advocates of Khrushchevian policies.

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