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Tackling Nigeria's Security Challenges: Negotiation with Boko Haram, or What?

Phillip E. Agbebaku, William E. Odion, and Mary Edokpa

For many years now Nigeria has been facing a plethora of security challenges. This includes the Niger Delta militants who engaged in disrupting oil exploration by kidnapping oil workers in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Their grievance was that the region that produces the wealth of the nation was neglected in terms of development. They wanted a better deal. The conflict situation improved with the declaration of Amnesty by the Yar'Adua administration. Another security challenge was posed by the Boko Haram insurgency. Boko Haram reared its ugly head in full force in 2011. The insurgency concentrated in the North East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, mainly in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States. Looting, kidnapping, burning, killing, etc. were their modus operandi. It got worse when they hoisted their flag in these states. This means the non-recognition of the authority of the Nigerian government—a secession bid. The federal government responded by declaring a state of emergency in the three worst hit states. Battalions of soldiers were drafted there to restore order, but the situation is still bad. A committee was also set up by the federal government to negotiate with this sect. The question to investigate is: What is the efficacy of the option of negotiation over the deployment of more military force? Boko Haram is a faceless group and one wonders who the federal government was negotiating with. This makes this option difficult. If the government decides on deploying troops, the war will be a long war as the sect employs guerrilla tactics. The paper recommends the two options—stick and carrot—so that this crisis can be brought to an end.

Introduction

Boko Haram activities in the Northern part of Nigeria respectively represent part of the challenges the nation must surmount to attain modernity. Tackling security challenge in Nigeria has remained a persistent problem. Internal problems such as the Boko Haram insurgency/terrorist activities have threatened the very foundation of the Nigerian state. The country is not faring better in the realm of tackling security challenges and nation building with other threatening issues like poverty, kidnapping, ethnic mutual suspicion, and religious intolerance constituting a disuniting force. Nigeria had been described as “a country perpetually potentially great, almost permanently in crisis, regularly threatened with disintegration, prolongingly devoid of democracy” (Obasanjo, 1994, p 31).

Boko Haram—“the book (western education) is prohibited”—is derived from the groups' abhorrence of western education and hinged on the belief that “education spoils the belief in ones' God.” The group is mostly based in the North East of Nigeria and has since spread to other parts of the North. The sect full name, *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), was led by Mohammed Yusuf. It seeks to create a Nigerian state governed by

Sharia law. It further seeks to achieve this aim seemingly by whatever means it has at its disposal and at whatever human cost. Other similar Islamic fundamentalist insurgents that existed in the past and have semblance with Boko Haram included the *Maitatsine*, inspired by a Cameroonian preacher—Muhammed Marwa; *Jama'atu Izalatil Bidi'a Waiqamatic Sunna* (Society of Removal of Innovation and Reestablishment of the Sunna) founded in 1978 in Jos and known as Izala; and the Islamic Movement of Nigeria - a Shiite movement led by Sheikh Ibrahim el-Zakzaky and funded by Iran (Codewit World News (CWN) 2012). Common to all of them is that they represent reactionary attempts to threaten the secularism that is constitutionally enshrined in the post-colonial state.

The objectives of this paper is to, among others, create a platform for the understanding of Boko Haram terrorism, identify and examine the efficacy of the option of negotiation or the deployment of military force.

This paper maintained the position canvassed by Imobighe (2006) that the miniaturization and proliferation of weapons of war (small and light) and other instruments of violence, occasioned by recent strides in military technology, have led to increased acts of militancy and terrorism. Globalization, which has led to increased human traffic across national borders with the resultant effect of scattering real and potential terrorists across the globe, have also contributed. Furthermore, tremendous developments in information technology with the consequence of global reach of aggrieved groups across the globe and their network have made it possible for terrorists to operate in small groups in a decentralized manner.

Terrorist operate effectively with ease and scale when they have access to funds. This is of course aided by modern sophisticated banking system which guarantees electronic banking that ensures that terrorists transfer and receive huge sums of money without creating suspicion at immigration points. Finally, we also subscribe to the belief that underlying conditions such as poverty, corruption, religious indoctrination, conflict, ethnic strife, existence of militias funded by politicians, and unemployment create opportunities for terrorists and militants to exploit. Terrorists use these conditions to justify their actions and expand their support. Beyond the above, poorer people are either more susceptible to the appeals of violent groups, or are more likely to participate in violence (Blair etal 2012).

Conceptualizing Terrorism

Terrorism can be said to represent the indiscriminate and random use of different levels of violence against an opponent or the ancillary interests of such an opponent, with whom one has adversarial relationship in order to strike fear on the latter and impose one's will on it, or tailor its actions towards a desired goal. It therefore means that the concept represents aspects of the violent instrument (usually sporadic and vicious) used by opposing sides in any form of contestation or struggle for power or influence. The different shades include low intensity violence, hostage taking, assassination, use of explosives and bombs. The target is not usually limited to the main combatants, but inclusive of all those with ancillary relationship with the target enemy (Imobighe, 2006). What states in this sub-region indiscriminately refer to as domestic terrorists are disgruntled and disenchanting groups who resort to arms and guerrilla tactics to protest official misrule, political disenfranchisement, political suppression, wanton resource expropriation, political majoritarianism/ethnic domination, reckless abuse of human rights and nepotism, among

others (Sampson, 2008). From the above definition, Boko Haram activities can best be described as acts of terrorism.

Terrorism may arise as a result of people's historical experience, as consequence of deprivation, wars, natural/man-made calamities, domination, and inequities. Domestic terrorism has arisen in Nigeria because emergent militant groups have taken advantage of governments' inefficient actions and inactions in dealing with the fundamental elements of nationhood namely, internal security, resource control/injustice, corruption/ethnicism, sycophancy/favoritism, and overlordship/marginalization. It is pertinent to add that while some of the terror groups have been settled, others have suffocated and crashed out or outlawed. Yet a few of them are still hibernating, waiting for a good opportunity to erupt violence (Obioma, 2014).

Table 1: Description of the Modus Operandi of Boko Haram

Criteria	Boko Haram
Target	Mostly security agencies, Christians, and civilians
Demand	Against western education (though they benefited from it) and to Islamize the country.
Sphere of Influence	Mostly Northern part of the country and North East in particular.
Precipitating Factors	Perhaps, poverty, extensive indoctrination, failed governance, political intrigues, and contradictions.
Leadership/Operational base	Centralized coordination and decentralized operational units/cells.
Identity	Unknown
Sponsorship	Local and international (politicians, security operatives, Islamic fundamentalists, and organizations)
Instrument of Operation	Mostly guns, bombs, and explosives/grenades
Strategy	Mostly killings, bombings, massive use of explosives, and hit and run
Government Response	Confrontational

A few deductions can be made from the table above. The first is the possible precipitating factors. The socio-economic hardships that daily confront the people in the North provide a ready army of willing youths. This could also be likened to the frustrations of the Niger Delta youths who equally suffered depravity and watched helplessly with pains, the degradation, and destruction of their eco-system. This means that the precipitating factors are not peculiar to certain region and are brought about by poor/failed governance, corruption and unemployment, etc.

This paper may posit that the identities of Boko Haram leaders are unknown to the public. But again, it is remarkable to note that the fear of government highhandedness, repression, and annihilation of the sect leaders might have driven them underground. Past encounters showed that most arrested sect members have been extra judicially murdered.

Arising from the above is the fact that because the identities and operational bases of Boko Haram are unknown, discussions with them by the government have been impossible. They operate in cells usually in hit and run form. In other cases, perpetrators

often embark on suicide mission. These unconventional tactics used by Boko Haram make engagement and easy defeat by the federal government difficult.

Issues and Questions from Boko Haram Insurgency

One of the issues is: What exactly is the demand of the Boko Haram? This is still shrouded in mystery. While their actions may spill blood, it is *ab initio* their strategy for drawing government attention. They are mainly made up of suicide bombers whose only apparent demand is their intention to cause mayhem, Islamize the country, and destroy the foundation of western education. These are demand that the secular nature of the Nigerian constitution does not accommodate. The constitution respects freedom of religion and therefore allows the existence of other religions and beliefs outside Islam. It further respects cultural diversity and very many languages.

The Boko Haram claim to be against western education (CWN, 2012) that it had benefited from through the technological knowledge deployed in the production of the explosives and other gadgets used in their activities are irreconcilable with reality. Indications are that there is more to it than meet the eye. A more difficult thing is that they are scattered everywhere such that they cannot easily be identified, often engaging in hit and run. Hence, Ogbeni (2012) asked: “negotiate with whom, and on what basis?” To him, negotiation can only happen after the leaders and members of the opposing camp have been identified. This cannot be said exactly of Boko Haram!

In other climes where acts of terrorism have become rooted such as Iraq and Afghanistan, the resort to car and suicide bombings has been reactions to foreign domination and occupation of their lands. But these cannot be said of Nigeria as nobody is currently occupying Nigeria apart from Nigerians. Whose interest are these bombers then serving? This question is apt against the backdrop that innocent Muslims and non-Muslims alike, youths, men, women, and schoolchildren have been constant victims of the deadly acts. The tales of woes, deaths, and destructions have cut across ethnic and religious divides.

Another emerging issue is the serious internal security challenge. Internal security has been defined as the totality of the nation’s equilibrium state which needs to be maintained so that the nation can carry out its normal functions without unnecessary interruptions from anywhere. Internal security involves government coordination of all those actions that would ensure that the equilibrium of the state is constantly maintained or quickly brought back to normalcy wherever it is threatened by any form of civil disturbances. Similarly, internal security could also mean the citizen’s expectation of government to make provision for protection of life and property, and safety from criminals and armed robbers. It is when there is stability of the environment, equilibrium in the state machinery (including political, social, and economic), the relative satisfaction on the part of the human elements of the state, and the general state of alertness of the citizens are guaranteed that the nation’s internal security is said to be in balanced state (Iweze, 1990). As the Nigeria experience had shown, the incapacity of the law enforcement agents to combat the aforementioned phenomenon and the persistence of acts of terrorism in the country are clear indications of the failure of the security system. A cardinal responsibility of any government is the control of the instruments of coercion and provision of security. Security needs in this context represents the totality of means that a country requires to deal with

the threat facing her. The henchman of the Boko Haram group—Kabiru Umar a.k.a. Sokoto, was arrested but escaped while in Police custody (though later rearrested). Government is also contending with the problem of the sect receiving funds from ‘brothers inside Nigeria’ particularly in government circles. With regard to the Boko Haram and other acts of criminality in the country generally, the government has not been able to proffer solution. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) captured this succinctly when it said, “we see in these attacks a total failure of our security system that has consistently displayed incompetence in securing life and properties of everyone living in Nigeria” (Adetunmbi, 2012, p 2).

There is yet the international dimension to the issue. A report by the United States (US) House of Representatives Sub-committee had linked the Boko Haram to non-Nigerian terrorist organization such as the al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Shabaab in Sudan (CWN, 2012). It described the Boko Haram as having the intent and may have developed capability to coordinate on a rhetorical and operational level with AQIM and al-Shabaab. It also submitted that the environment was ripe for recruitment while urging the US to work with Nigeria to build counterterrorism and intelligence capability to effectively combat the sect. This has ensured that the sect and by implication, Nigeria will now be in the international spotlight. This of course portends negative omen such as branding the country as a terrorist state. But for now, Boko Haram has been designated a terrorist organization.

Indications that the Boko Haram networks with foreign terrorist groups manifests in the suspicion of The United Kingdom (UK)-based al-Mutanda extending funding to Boko Haram. The sect tact of posting video messages conforms to an al-Qaeda international *jihadi* style. With the launch on Twitter, it has adopted a new online presence taken to new level by al-Shabaab. The bombing of United Nations (UN) building (described by Boko Haram as “forum of all global evil”) showed a new level of coordination, expertise with explosives of similar military grades abroad leading to theories of links with other terrorist groups.

The destructive nature of violence constitutes severe threat to socio-economic development and sustainable livelihood in Nigeria. The impact of the activities of Boko Haram includes loss of lives and properties, battered international image, loss of revenue, proliferation of arms and deadly weapons, fresh challenges for security operatives, increased security budgets, problem of integration, and discouragement of investments/investors. It has the capacity to severely constrain development endeavors by destroying infrastructures, interrupting production process, and diverting resources away from productive uses. Violence, conflicts, and instability do not only destroy the very foundation of development, it is difficult to mobilize structures and resources in support of development under the aforementioned conditions. Evidences abound to justify that peace, stability, and security are necessary prerequisite for development (Bhagwati, 1995).

State Response to Boko Haram Insurgency

The Nigerian state has responded to the Boko Haram insurgency in a number of ways. Currently, a ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) Senator of the Federal Republic is standing trial for disclosing the phone numbers of prominent politicians and public officials

who were later threatened. On the basis of the threat, they were made to provide logistics and support to the sect (CWN, 2012).

Since they were not known directly, dialoguing with them has been most difficult. The failure to disclose their identity and demands prompted the federal government decision to tackle them headlong by applying military force through the Joint Military Task Force (JTF), made up of security operatives. It has also stepped up surveillance in the region to track down members of the deadly sect, increased military presence in the Northern region while also encouraging citizens to volunteer information about them. An attempt by former President Olusegun Obasanjo to initiate and open up channels of dialogue by visiting the relations of the slain sectarian leader in Maiduguri, Borno State, elicited the wrath of the other Boko Haram sect members who moved immediately to kill the Yusuf's family visited by Obasanjo.

The Presidency had earlier set up a Presidential Committee to investigate the sect; ushered in a Terrorism (Prevention) Act; tightened border controls with her neighbors (Cameroon, Chad, and Niger); and repatriated over 11,000 illegal foreign immigrants suspected to have links with the sect. Consequent upon the increased spate of terrorist attacks coupled with the suspicion of collaboration from within the security apparatus, the federal government had to relieve the Inspector General of Police Hafiz Ringim and six Deputy Inspectors General of Police of their jobs in a bid to reorganize and reposition the police force. In addition, security has featured prominently in government budget since 2012, while the sect spokesman has been jailed. Other measures included the setting up of the Dr. Tanimu Turaki-led Presidential Committee on the Dialogue of Peaceful Resolution of Conflict in Northern Nigeria; setting up of the Committee on Small Arms Proliferation in the North; proscription of Ansarul and Boko Haram sect in 2013; the federal government approval of the release of women and children detained in connection with Boko Haram activities; and declaration of emergency rule in three Northern States - (Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States).

Boko Haram was, before 2011, a little-understood, dangerous but parochial Islamic sect believed to be in decline after a "purge" by Nigerian security forces in 2009 (CWN, 2012). What is called "purge" here was actually military annihilation of sect leaders/members by security operatives backed by government might. This drove them underground and engaging them has been difficult for the federal government. The reasons are that they are faceless, but deadly, and accommodating their demands within the secularism of the Nigerian state is seemingly impossible. Besides, the government also suspects (though unsubstantiated) that suspected members of the sect had permeated the seat of government and security agencies.

Resolving the Quagmire: Negotiation or Deployment of Military Force?

Negotiation is one of the most common approaches to make decisions and manage disputes. It occurs between spouses, parents and children, managers and staff, employers and employees, professionals and clients, within and between organizations, between agencies and the public, and between governments and groups. It is a problem solving process in which two or more people voluntarily discuss their differences and attempt to reach a joint decision on common concerns. This approach requires participants to identify issues about which they differ, educate each other about their needs and interests, generate

possible settlement options, and bargain over the terms of the final agreement (Moore, 2014).

There is no gainsaying the fact that there is benefit in successful negotiation with Boko Haram. Such benefits includes increasing the visibility of the dispute; restoration of peace in the region and country; restoration of confidence in the states' ability to ensure safety of lives and properties; encourage investments/investors; reduce defense expenditure which has since skyrocketed; lifting of emergency rule in affected states with the attendant benefits; removal/reduction in arms proliferation and heavy militarization of the region; and reintegration of dislocated families as well as providing the citizens in the region a sense of belonging in a federation. The question remains: negotiate with whom and on what basis and terms? Can their demand for the Islamization of Nigeria be accommodated in a secular state such as Nigeria? These questions are germane at this juncture because Moore (2014), had opined that the conditions for negotiation must include the followings: (i) identifiable parties who are willing to participate; (ii) interdependence; (iii) readiness to negotiate; (iv) means of influence or leverage; (v) agreement on some issues and interests; (vi) willingness to settle; (vii) unpredictability of outcome; (viii) a sense of urgency and deadline; (ix) no major psychological barriers to settlement; (x) issues that are negotiable; (xi) the people must have the authority to decide; (xii) the agreement that is reasonable and implementable; (xiii) external factors that are favourable to settlement; and (xiv) the presence of resources to negotiate. As the Nigerian experience has shown, the above conditions are clearly absent.

The olive branch had been extended to Boko Haram to come out and embrace peace but was rejected. The initiative on the part of the government was guided such that it does not mean weakness on the part of the government or that any group of young men equipped with a dozen AK-47s, will be encouraged to take up arms against the nation, in the knowledge that the government will eventually agree to negotiate and give in to their demands. The federal government continuous deployment of the military to the North East is a clear indication that the government has the capacity to stamp its authority/sovereignty over her territory and is not ready to cede any part. As experience has shown, a state is what it is by virtue of its capacity to repel every threat to its existence. The state of Israel has demonstrated that a state can overcome the irritations of suicide bombings. The US has also demonstrated that terrorists can be tracked down and their infrastructures dismantled while Turkey has been successful in containing the Partiya Karkeren Kudistane (PKK) uprising (Ogbeni, 2012). However, the failure of Boko Haram members to embrace amnesty made the federal government to declare a state of emergency in three Northern states—Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, respectively, which has since been followed by direct military confrontation with the sect members.

Specifically, the refusal of Boko Haram members to negotiate may find explanation in (i) conferring sense of legitimacy on their adversary; (ii) fearful of being perceived as weak by their members, their adversary (the government), and by the public; (iii) fear of providing false hope to the Boko Haram constituency and government; (iv) meeting is time consuming; (v) lack of confidence in the process accentuated by previous disappointments; (vi) fear of locking themselves into a tight position, etc.

The President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, continues to appeal to the sect to lay down their arms and come to the negotiation table but to no avail. But while hoping that a positive response will come one day, the military option is on.

The Military Option

The inability of government to resolve the above issues/questions coupled with the rejection of the olive branch made the federal government to embrace the military option of direct confrontation. Though the features are the direct opposite of the negotiation option, it still remains the best in the circumstance considering the fact that government has a duty to protect the lives and properties of her citizens anywhere in the country. Otherwise, the society may relapse into lawlessness and brutish state where might is right.

The security breach in the North East of Nigeria resulting in colossal loss of human, material, and collateral is worrisome. Since 2010, the activities of the Boko Haram sect in that part of the country have been on the increase. With the authority of the federal government challenged and with the sects' refusal to come to the negotiating table, the federal government had no choice but to deploy the military to the affected area. And ever since, there have been continuous reinforcement.

To restrict the movement of the insurgents and deny them freedom of operation, a state of emergency was declared in the three North Eastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. An army division has been created in Borno to take care of the area and sophisticated arms, and ammunitions and other military equipments are being transported there regularly. With these and aerial support considerable casualty has been inflicted on the Boko Haram.

However, it will be self-delusion to believe at this stage that the sect has been annihilated, far from it. The abduction and non-release of over 200 Chibok schoolgirls and the recent dastardly attacks by the sect speak much. Their recent attack on a federal government college in Buni Yadi in Yobe State in which more than fifty innocent schoolchildren were killed and the abduction of twenty-five teenage school girls is a case in point. This development has since negatively impacted on girl child education in Nigeria.

The capacity of the military is not in doubt, but what is in doubt and therefore worrisome is the capability. According to Umar (2014), capability refers to the required backing, in every sense of the word, which the military needs, to do their part of the multifaceted task. The military may try, but our collective disposition and support across board will play key role in what will or will not be achieved.

Among the challenges that will negatively affect the capability of the military and affect the prosecution of the expedition is/are lack of motivation. The military personnel sent to the theater of operation are entitled to some motivation such as special allowances and other incentives. It was common knowledge at a time that the soldiers in the field were shortchanged in the payment of their allowances. With this, one should not expect the best from them.

Many believe that the situation got to this stage because of poor intelligence gathering. The security agencies of the state failed in their intelligence gathering or failed to use the information that was supplied to them. The successes recorded by the Boko Haram in their incessant attacks on villages demonstrate this. Lack of cooperation among the service chiefs, field commanders, and the entire security agencies had not help matters.

The infiltration of moles and the existence of Boko Haram members in the police, military, and other government establishments have greatly assisted their cause and the prolongation of the conflict. President Goodluck Jonathan himself said it that there are Boko Haram members in his government. From there members everywhere, they gather

information and receive other assistance. This is coupled with the presence of “cowards within the army” as claimed by National Security Adviser.

The sect members live among the population in the various towns of the Northeast. So it is not easy to identify and fish them out of the crowd. They use the innocent civilians as human shield. A more frightening dimension is the use of female suicide bombers. Unsuspecting military personnel and Nigerians have fallen to this terrorist strategy. Until the people agree to volunteer information to the security agencies about the identity of the Boko Haram, the military option will continue to witness some setback. And it will be violating international rules of engagement if the military decide to move in full force and wipe out both the sect members (combatants) and the innocent (non-combatants) alike as suggested by some commentators and writers.

One of the biggest challenges hindering the quick success of the military option is the externalization of the crisis. There is evidence that Boko Haram gets its funding and other logistics support from AQIM which supplies weapons like Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), guns, and ammunitions.

Added to the international dimension is the lack of initial total support by some Nigeria neighbors. The republics of Mali, Cameroun, Chad, and Niger share boundaries with Nigeria and some members of this sect are harbored in these countries and when pursued by the Nigeria military, they run to take refuge/shelter in these countries. They also serve as routes through which arms and ammunitions are brought into the country. Full commitment and collaboration is needed and expected of them. One would advise that if diplomacy with these countries is not yielding the required result, the Nigeria military should as a matter of self-defense pursue the sect members deep into the territories of these countries, after which further discussions can follow. This option was explored when the Nigeria military pursued several insurgents into Cameroun but were accosted by the *gerdames*. Diplomatic intervention led to their release.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this article, effort was made to attempt an expose of the Boko Haram sect. Emerging issues were identified while concluding that in the midst of the challenges, the state had responded severally in different forms. But the bottom line remains that good governance must be instituted such that the issues that predispose the groups to challenge the state can be resolved. The sense in which Nigeria leaders equate security with the accumulation of sophisticated weapons and hardware must be discouraged. Emphasis should rather be on providing leverages for ameliorating the socio-economic hardship that daily confronts the people.

The desire of the United States of America (USA), France, and The Great Britain governments to collaborate with the Nigerian authorities is a welcome development. This is coming on the hills that terrorism is a global phenomenon and a US congressional report already classified Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on the basis that the group is an emerging threat to US homeland. Terrorism is not a fight that can be left for an individual country to fight, basically because the result of such attacks may cut across nationalities. The attack on the UN building in Nigeria, for example, left in its toll the death of both Nigerians and foreigners alike.

It is not enough for international community to collaborate in building counterterrorism and intelligence capability to deal with the Boko Haram, it is also important that they collaborate in ensuring good governance, transparency, and accountability. It is good governance that can solve the underlying conditions that catalyze the groups into challenging the state. Political leaders have not been accountable to the people and the socio-economic inequality keeps widening everyday. Governments at all levels must be pressurized to redress the socio-economic indicators to improve the conditions of the people, instill confidence in the state, and ensure peace. It will only take superior intelligence network to suppress and defeat members of the sect if the above are ignored especially when there are suspected undue links in the government.

A proactive policing method has the advantage of preventing crimes before they are committed. The activities of the local JTF in the North as part of community policing method is worth commending. Their emergence is to collaborate with the law enforcement agents in dealing with the activities of Boko Haram to prevent their being wiped out untimely. However, this kind of partnership/engagement must be guided to avoid the emergence of another round of militancy after dislodging the current insecurity challenge.

Negotiation and the deployment of military force have been critical options at the disposal of the federal government. While the negotiation option has its own challenges, the deployment of military force also has its own consequences. Therefore, a blend of the two which represents the carrot and stick appears to be more credible option to deal with the situation.

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