

# CAUCASUS 2012 DRILLS: RUSSIA'S EFFICACY ATTEMPTS IN THE CAUCASUS AS PART OF ITS SECURITY STRATEGIES

(KAFKAS 2012 TATBİKATI: GÜVENLİK STRATEJİLERİ KAPSAMINDA RUSYA'NIN KAFKASLARDA ETKİNLİK DENEMESİ)

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**Abstract:** *The Caucasus-2012 drill has been one of the most influential among Russia's military exercises. Rather than its dimension, capacity, potential and influence, evaluations in terms of regional security policies have become the agenda topic. According to some commentators, the main goal of the Caucasus-2012 drill has been considered to be a preparation for the security of the Olympic Games to be held in Sochi in 2014. According to another version, Russia will not be able to be a mere spectator during a possible attack on Iran. Moreover, it could be observed that this drill is assessed to be a threatening and pressuring move against Georgia's security. Although the Russian military base in Armenia is not involved in this drill directly, a joint drill of the CSTO armed forces under the name of "Interaction-2012". Taking all these into consideration, it is also mentioned that Caucasus-2012 also has hidden goals.*

**Keywords:** *Caucasus-2012, military drill, Russia, Armenia, Georgia, military bases*

**Öz:** *Kafkas-2012 tatbikati son yirmi yıl içinde Rusya'nın askeri tatbikatları içinde en fazla ses getireni oldu. Tatbikatın boyutu, kapasitesi, potansiyeli ve etkinliğinden ziyade bölgesel güvenlik politikaları açısından yapılan değerlendirmeler gündem konusu olmuştur. Bazı yorumculara göre Kafkas – 2012 tatbikatının temel hedefi 2014'de Soçi'de yapılacak Olimpiyat Oyunlarının güvenliğine bir hazırlık olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Başka bir versiyona göre İran'a yapılacak muhtemel saldırı sırasında Rusya seyirci kalamayacak. Bunun yanı sıra bu tatbikatın Gürcistan'ın güvenliğine karşı bir tehdit ve baskı eylemi olarak değerlendirildiğini görebilmekteyiz. Ermenistan'daki Rus askeri üssü bu tatbikatta doğrudan yer almasa da "Etkileşim - 2012" adı altında KGAÖ silahlı birliklerinin ortak tatbikati düzenlenmiştir. Tüm bunları dikkate alarak Kafkas-2012 tatbikatının saklı amaçlarının olduğundan da bahsedilmektedir.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Kafkas-2012, askeri tatbikat, Rusya, Ermenistan, Gürcistan, askeri üsler*

## Introduction

The “multipolar world system” policy, which Russia consistently mentions and works towards its implementation, is a policy which is impossible to be achieved under today’s conditions. Activities to increase Russia’s efficacy in the Caucasus and Central Asia have gained a new momentum when Putin came to power. This issue becomes apparent in activities towards the development of new projects in the economic and security areas and enlarging and deepening the current policies. However, during when the bipolar system was dominant, Russia did not have the strength to carry the potential of being a “global power” of the Soviet Union and the satellite states. Therefore, in order to gain efficacy in the Near Abroad, it wanted to advance the process by developing military and political alliances and making bilateral agreements. In this aspect, the Customs Union, Eurasian Union, strengthening the organizational structure of the CIS and allowing the CSTO to gain efficacy is among Moscow’s primary issues of foreign policy. In fact, this approach

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also formed basis of the “near abroad” policy Russia declared after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even though this area is still regarded as Russia’s domain, the continuation of this situation has not been easy for the Moscow administration and is currently still not easy. From the Caucasus perspective, we see a Georgia whose relations with Russia are on very bad terms. Although as time passes and balancing policies are becoming more and more deregulated, Azerbaijan keeps its distance with Russia and the problem of mutual trust between the two countries has always revealed itself. The only “ally” of Russia in the Caucasus is Armenia which is economically weak and has no direct border link with Russia. Thus Russia is in a disadvantageous position in the Caucasus. When considering that the most problematic region within Russia’s borders is again the Caucasus, it becomes evident that Russia must show much more effort towards the region in the short and medium term. Therefore, Russia is obliged to increase its military activity and to carry its security strategies to a new dimension. An opposite situation could further reduce Russia’s efficacy in the Caucasus which is already problematic. Upon coming to power, Putin declared that the Foreign Policy Concept would be prepared and implemented until the end of this year. Based on news leaked to the press, the Concept (Document) is prepared. However, the text of the document has not yet been published in the press. The primary issue is the reinforcement of the CIS. Recently Russia will give priority to this issue in its foreign policy. In a situation where economic crisis

and the “Arab Spring” exist, Russia necessitates the advancement of the “integration” period with its close neighbors<sup>1</sup>.

It is difficult to say that this “integration” will gain success in the economic area. There are many reasons for this. It is a known fact that political integration takes place not willingly, but under pressure. The development of the political integration process from now on will also be possible under these pressures.

One of the most effective instruments in Russia's keep is its army. The doubts that the Russian army, which has attempted to reform and reorganize for more than twenty years, will successfully complete the reform process it is currently in, are more than the hopes in this direction. Its reorganization as an army carrying the potential of having a dynamic and effective impact by eluding from its traditional structure based on numerical superiority passes through the resolution of many structural issues. In this situation, Russia's Caucasus-2012 drill is important in several aspects. Through this drill, the Russian Armed Forces has tested the capability of the southern troops. Furthermore, it has been a show of strength towards the opposition and the illegal forces in the Northern Caucasus found within its own borders and also towards the countries of the Southern Caucasus (Azerbaijan and Georgia).

### **Caucasus-2012: Potential, Capacity, Goal**

The capacity and potential of the war games in the Caucasus-2012 drill is different than the drills taking place in other areas at the same time. The war games in the drill have taken place in four shooting ranges on the polygons of “Prudboy”, “Kapustin Yar”, “Ashuluk” and “Raevsky”. This drill, which started on the “Raevsky” range (country of Krasnodar) on September 17, has continued until 23<sup>rd</sup> September. The area of exercise has been determined as the Southern Military circle. Observing this and its other properties, we could determine what kind of war games Caucasus-2012 has presented, along with its capacity, potential and also its goals.

1. Statistically, it has taken place with a crowded attendance. In this drill where eight thousand people participated, 200 armaments and equipment, 100 cannons, approximately ten ships and boats have been used and 80 flights have taken place. This has been considered as the most important event in 2012 within the Russian army<sup>2</sup> and it should

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1 Первым делом – СНГ: Разработана новая концепция внешней политики России, <http://www.rg.ru/2012/12/17/politika.html>, 17.12.2012

2 “Кавказ-2012” маневрирует в сторону Сочи-2014 [http://www.ng.ru/nvo/2012-08-08/1\\_caucasus.html](http://www.ng.ru/nvo/2012-08-08/1_caucasus.html), 08.08.2012

also be mentioned that it has made an impression in the international area. The Federal Security Service (FSB), Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Extraordinary Situations, the Federal Protective Service and other paramilitary organizations have also participated.

The GLONNAS<sup>3</sup> system will be used in the exploration operations (Note:). The newest planes and helicopters are available in this system. All helicopters and journey vehicles in the Military Zone have already been renewed. Moreover, this system has been equipped with vehicles artillery vehicles and air defense systems. The “Barnaul T” management system with new automatization of the Barunal-air defense forces has been used for the first time in this drill. This system is not only able to keep the Northern Caucasus under control, but also the Southern Caucasus. This feature is important for the 102<sup>nd</sup> military base in Armenia. The issue of logistic assistance in Caucasus-2012 has also been one of the primary subjects. Pipe laying forces, which are only found in the Russian army in the world, have also been active. These forces had also played an active role in 2008 during the Georgian war. These forces have installed 75 km of pipes in the Caucasian mountains in 2011. During the drill, “İskender” missiles, bladed rockets and sea forces and also ship repelling systems have also been used.

2. This drill is also the first full-scale drill after the division units in the army forces were abolished and replaced by brigade units. Significant changes have been made to the Army Forces starting in 2009. The division units, which were difficult to be managed, had first been reformed to be replaced with brigades. Currently, the structural units in the Russian army are in a hierarchy of battalion - brigade – operative commandership. Units like the traditional regiment, squad, army corps and army have completely been eliminated<sup>4</sup>.

3. The drill has taken place in the Southern Military Zone<sup>5</sup>. The Army

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3 Global Navigation Satellite System, is a radio-based satellite navigation system operated for the Russian government by the Russian Aerospace Defence Forces. It both complements and provides an alternative to the United States' Global Positioning System (GPS) and is currently the only alternative navigational system in operation with global coverage and of comparable precision.

4 85 brigades have been formed in the Army Forces after the reform. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the numerical power of the Army Forces has experienced a serious decrease. According to specialists, the proportion of Army Forces within the RF Armed Forces is below 30% and when compared to the other armies in the world, is at very low levels. Структура Сухопутных войск, [http://army.lv/ru/Istoriya-Rossii/Rossiyskaya-Federatsiya-\(1991-...\)/Vooruzhennie-Sili-RF/Suhoputnie-voyska/Struktura-Suhoputnih-voysk/2120](http://army.lv/ru/Istoriya-Rossii/Rossiyskaya-Federatsiya-(1991-...)/Vooruzhennie-Sili-RF/Suhoputnie-voyska/Struktura-Suhoputnih-voysk/2120)

5 This district formed for the first time with the name Northern Caucasus Military District, has been installed on 4 May 1918. This district, which has experienced structural changes during the course of its development with some regulations, has been installed since 4 October 2010 with the President of the Russian Federation's "the Russian Federation's Decree Concerning its Military Divisions" (20 September 2010) the Southern Caucasus Military District has been installed within the scope of the Northern Caucasus Military District.

Forces in this zone are located within the 4 military areas (okrug)<sup>6</sup> formed on strategic directions. The reconstruction of the last area has been executed as a result of new reforms. The regions of Moscow, Leningrad, Northern Caucasus, Volga-Ural, Siberia, and Far East which existed before have been removed and replaced by the new four areas. The names of the newly formed areas are mentioned as the following since 1<sup>st</sup> December 2010. 1) Central Military District, 2) Southern Military District, 3) Western Military District, 4) Eastern Military District<sup>7</sup>. The forces in the Southern Military District are mostly known as Russia's leading military forces. They have also been equipped with more modern weapons. While the Southern Military District was formed within the range of the Northern Caucasus Military District, the Black Sea navy and the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandership of the Air Forces and Air Repelling Forces are also located in this district. The forces in this district had directly intervened in Georgia in August 2008. Today, the Southern Military District encompasses the administrative borders of the two Federal Districts (Southern Region and Northern Caucasus Region) and 12 federate units of the Russian Federation exist in these regions. Moreover, Russia's military bases in Ukraine, Armenia, Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia also exist within the commandership of this region. The military quarter of the region is located in the city of Rostov-Don. All military and paramilitary forces besides the strategically aimed rocket forces and air-space defense forces are connected to this commandership. The Ministry of Interior, FSB Border Guard Troops, Ministry of Extraordinary Situations and the forces of other ministries and organizations are also within the scope of authority of this commandership<sup>8</sup>.

4. Based on official evaluations, the war games have been accomplished on a high level. Based on the evaluations made on the high level of the military chain of command, it is normal for some defects to take place. But, in general, the army has successfully accomplished the task given to it. While observing the Caucasus-2012, President V. Putin has emphasized that it has been performed at a high level<sup>9</sup>.

In unofficial evaluations, different approaches have been displayed concerning the drill's capacity and potential. According to some commentators, the Caucasus-2012 drill is the most confidential drill that Russia has performed

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6 West, South, Central and Eastern districts

7 Медведев подписал указ "О военно-административном делении РФ", <http://ria.ru/politics/20100921/277669145.html>, 21/09/2010

8 Южный военный округ, <http://structure.mil.ru/structure/okruga/south/history.htm>

9 Путин на "отлично" оценил проведение учений "Кавказ-2012", [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20120917/752656250.html#ixzz2FRV8zwSR](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20120917/752656250.html#ixzz2FRV8zwSR)

in the last twenty years. The drill has taken place closed to foreign journalists and specialists. On the other hand, the country's journalists have only been at the drill area once during Putin's visit. The reason for this confidentiality was to prevent excuses for foreign pressures to increase regarding the drill. The drill being presented as a "command-military quarter drill"<sup>10</sup> has served towards hiding the actual purpose of the drill<sup>11</sup>. If these allegations are true, then it is possible to say that the information provided on the number of soldiers participating in the drill and the weapons and equipments used are also not correct, because if the number of soldiers participating in the drill are over ten thousand, foreign observers must be invited based on the agreement made between Russia and NATO. As emphasized above, the number of soldiers participating in the drill is eight thousand.

### **The Country In and Outside the Drill: Armenia**

Within the framework of the reforms made in the army forces in Russia, important changes have also been made in the structure of the 102<sup>nd</sup> military base in Armenia. Firstly, changes have been made structurally in the units within the military base and the brigade system has started being used. Within the former 123<sup>rd</sup> motorized regiment, the 73<sup>rd</sup> independent motorized brigade (Yerevan) and within the former 124<sup>th</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup> motorized regiment, the 76<sup>th</sup> independent motorized brigade (Gyumri) has been installed. These reconstructions have been organized with the December 2008 dated regulation numbered 5/50 of the combined brigade (based on Armored Combat Vehicles and Slightly Armored Palletized Land Vehicles) structure approved by the Russian Federation Armed Forces Presidency of General Staff. The current potential of the 102<sup>nd</sup> military base following the restructure is as follows.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> independent motorized brigade (Yerevan): 3 motorized battalion, tank battalion, 2 howitzer self dynamic artillery squadron, reactive artillery squadron, antitank artillery squadron, anti-plane missile squadron, pioneer battalion commandership, communication squadron, logistic assistance squadron, repair-restoration squadron, administration and artillery exploration battery, exploration squadron, radiation, chemical and biological defense squadron, medical squadron, commander squadron, shooter team (strong shooters) totaling 4393 soldiers.

Apart from these, the 566<sup>th</sup> independent communication brigade (Gyumri): 65 people, 988 anti-plane missile regiment (Gyumri), 2 C-300B squadron,

10 A majority of the war games in command-military quarter drill are performed on maps, models and computer.

11 Эксперты разошлись в оценках учений "Кавказ-2012" <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/213162/>, 26.09. 201

3624 air bases are found (16 Mig-29, 2 Mig-29UB). Since 2010, the arms equipment of the base has been developed, equipped with S-300 and Mig-29's. In the declaration made by the Russian Federation's Ministry of Defense on October-November 2011, it has been said that the 102<sup>nd</sup> military base has completely been accomplished. Families of the soldiers have moved to Russia, the number of soldiers in the military post near Yerevan have been decreased and the military forces there have been deployed to Gyumri, the Turkish border. The military sites evacuated by the Russians have been passed on to the Yerevan post under the inspection of the RF Armed Forces Army Forces Commander Aleksandr Postnikov. The weapons left behind during the reconstruction have also been passed on to the Armenian army.

Again in March 2012, a drill has been performed in the military base in Gyumri. 1000 soldiers have attended the drill and 200 weapons and military vehicles have been used. According to some, this drill was a preparation before the military attack on Iran. According to the Russians, if the US attacks Iran, it would use Turkey's territories. In this situation, the Russian army must be prepared for the developments. As a matter of fact, the forces in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia have also been called to vigilance.

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Before the Caucasus-2012 drill started, Georgia had started talking against this drill within world public opinion. The Western state and the US have mentioned that this drill should not be performed. Against these statements and pressures, Russia has somehow been forced to take a step back and has decided not to include the military bases in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia and also the military bases in Arenia in the drill. Despite this decision, some units belonging to the military bases in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia have also been drilled. Concerning the military base in Armenia, a different formual has been formed and a joint drill has been made by the CSTO with the title "Interaction-2012". Two thousand soldiers, more than 500 war vehicles, 50 artilleries and 200 equipments have been used in the drill<sup>12</sup>.

### Georgia's Concerns

A decleration was made by NATO on September 5<sup>th</sup>, requesting Caucasus-2012 to be performed as transparent as possible. Moreover, it has called on

12 Учение КСОР ОДКБ «Взаимодействие-2012» в Армении завершилось победой союзников, [http://odkb-csto.org/news/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=1135](http://odkb-csto.org/news/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=1135)

Russia to respect international agreements and Georgia to respect territorial integrity. The Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian army Aleksandr Postnikov has announced that Caucasus-2012 will not entail a threat to the other countries (The Georgian government has said that this drill will threaten the region and has regarded it as psychological pressure before the Georgian parliamentary elections held on 1 October 2012). Georgia's statements and initiatives have caused the US and Europe to bring this issue under examination. In a statement made by the Estonian Minister of Defense, it has been indicated that Russia's aim in organizing such a drill was an attempt to keep Georgia "in its place". By mentioning that a similar drill had taken place in 2008 before the attack on Georgia, he has referred to the possibility of a new attack<sup>13</sup>. These kinds of pressures have caused Russia to make a change in the decision it had reached. It was said that the military bases in Armenia, Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia would be including in the war games within the scope of this drill<sup>14</sup>. However, due to these pressures, by finally making a change in its decision, Russia has announced that the Russian bases in these countries will not be included in the drill<sup>15</sup>. By calling upon Russia, the Secretary General of NATO and other officials have expressed that the drill must be made in a "transparent" manner. Tbilisi has regarded this decision as a diplomatic achievement<sup>16</sup>.

### **"Caucasus-2012"'s Open and Hidden Goals**

Official statements concerning the purpose of the Caucasus-2012 drill has not been satisfying and a series of unofficial versions and statements have been brought forward. While emphasizing the level of truth in a majority of these statements, we should also note that there are several goals or purposes. When addressing the issue as a whole and evaluating these events together with the war games organized in the Russian Armed Forces, we are able to reach the conviction that these goals are more than one.

1. Right before the Caucasus-2012 drill, an operational technical drill was made in Moscow on 14 September under the name "Thunderclap-2012" belonging to organizations combating drugs. On 15-19 September, the joint military exercise of the CSTO military troops with the title "Interaction-2012". At first sight, these drills have been organized independently from each other. However, some

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13 Путин готовит "второй этап завоевания Грузии", решил эстонский министр обороны и назвал два признака, [http://www.newsru.com/world/13sep2012/putin\\_ivanishvili.html](http://www.newsru.com/world/13sep2012/putin_ivanishvili.html)

14 Daha önce de Rus genelkurmayı Çeçenistan'daki poligonların (Alpiyskiy, "Gvardeyskiy", Kalinovskiy) tatbikat dışında tutulacağını açıklamıştır. Fakat bu karar Gürcistan'ın endişelerini gidermemiştir.

15 "Кавказ-2012" маневрирует в сторону Сочи-2014, [http://www.ng.ru/nvo/2012-08-08/1\\_caucasus.html](http://www.ng.ru/nvo/2012-08-08/1_caucasus.html)

16 Виталий Камышев, "Кавказ-2012": версии и подозрения, <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/24712286.html>



commentators say that the common goal of these drills is to prepare for the security in the 2014 Olympic Games to be held in Sochi.

2. In both Caucasus-2012 and the war games of the CSTO, it could be seen that many strategic issues exist. Important equipments such as automotized administration systems, space exploration, unmanned airplanes etc. have been used. Another important point is that the air assault forces have played an active role in the war games. In a situation where Georgian airspace is closed to military aircraft and Azerbaijan does not allot its own airspace to the military aircraft flying to Armenia, no answer could be found to the question of how airborne assault squadron has a place within "Interaction-2012". The military base in Armenia being situated in the Southern Military District and the "Interaction-2012" and the "Caucasus-2012" drills starting almost at the same time cause one to believe that there is a strong link between these<sup>17</sup>.

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3. The most important is during the speech delivered by President V. Putin of the Russian Federation who met with the commanders during the drill, it has been mentioned that the increase of the use of force in the international area necessitates Russia to also increase its defense capacity. Putin has said "You have the capacity to understand what is going on in the world. Use of force is gradually increasing in international issues. We must guarantee our own security by increasing Russia's defense capacity". Putin has also emphasized "With this drill, armed forces must show that they are ready to protect their national interests. We must be ready to respond to threats and difficulties directed towards Russia's national security"<sup>18</sup>.
4. When considering these statements and comments, the Caucasus-2012 drill is a multi dimensional drill in terms of its purpose and goals. Rapidly recovering during a possible attack on Iran and securing the southern borders has been a display of power towards the illegal armed

17 Газета выявила "тайны" военных учений с участием России, включая "Кавказ-2012", и разгадала их единый замысел, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/18sep2012/manoevresplan.html>, 18 сентября 2012

18 Rusya'dan Kafkasya'da Dev Askeri Tatbikat! [http://www.anadoluhaberim.com/haber\\_detay.asp?haberID=3789](http://www.anadoluhaberim.com/haber_detay.asp?haberID=3789) 18 September 2012

organizations in the Caucasus and against states like Georgia and Azerbaijan.

5. With this drill, the Russian Armed Forces have been able to test how much the reforms have affected the army's tactic and operational capability.

## **Conclusion**

The execution of the Caucasus-2012 drill should first be evaluated as a display of strength of the Russian army. The war games performed within the scope of this and other drills have been important in testing the maneuvers and tactic capability of the army.

Due to new regulations made in the last 20 years, reforms have continued without a systematic change being made in the army's structure by reducing the number of soldiers. However, concerning the reforms made after 2008, it has been indicated by specialists that the Russian army is not able to resolve its current issues. The power to equip the very crowded army with modern weapons possessing advanced technology is very limited. Moreover, the social problems of military employees, also taking in to consideration unpreventable problems like bribery and corruption in a situation where there is no transparent administration, trying to reach a resolution by reducing numerical power are perhaps the only choice that Russia has today. Many different assessments are made in Russia today regarding military reforms. While some specialists emphasize that these reforms are a recipe to salvation, many other specialists believe that new reforms would significantly reduce the Russian army's war and defense capability. Furthermore, it is also underlined that the finance required to implement the reforms entails a separate problem. The scandals of corruption that have been brought to the Russian army's agenda in the last month, the Minister of Defense being relieved of duty and the new investigations taking place after this incident, and the comments made by specialists show that it is not easy for the Russian army to easily escape the situation it is currently in. The corruptions experienced within the army and the reforms made not creating positive results and the perceptions that those advocating and opposing a reform on high administrative levels are in domestic competition display that the Russian army is having great difficulty in overcoming its problems.

While events have developed in this manner, the agreement on the Gebele base in Azerbaijan not being extended has forlorn Russia. These developments create the idea that it is possible for Russia to give priority to

the policy of “at least protecting what is in its hands” from now on in the process. We could say that from now on, Russia will increase the number of army forces in the Northern Caucasus in the short and medium term and small regional drills will frequently take place in the future.

From the political aspect, Russia increasing its efficacy in close countries and giving priority to “regional integration” policies are also among these possibilities. Based on news leaked to the press, one of the primary issues of the new Foreign Policy Concept presumed to be published at a recent date is the reinforcement of the structure of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Based on this document, in a situation where economic crisis and the “Arab Spring” exist, Russia necessitates the advancement of the “integration” period with its close neighbors<sup>19</sup>. This issue has been determined as Russia's primary goals of its recent foreign policy.

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19 Первым делом – СНГ: Разработана новая концепция внешней политики России, <http://www.rg.ru/2012/12/17/politika.html>, 17.12.2012

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