

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Algeria Monthly Briefing October 2022

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#### Algeria Summary 17 October 2022

*French prime minister Elisabeth Borne and a delegation of more than a dozen ministers arrive in Algeria on 16 September for a two-day trip, in the latest attempt to rebuild relations with Algeria, a major oil producer for Europe. Algeria is set to benefit from higher natural gas prices after Italy and Spain agree to pay more for the commodity as the European countries seek to secure sufficient alternatives from Algiers to make up for shortfalls during the coming winter. A bipartisan group of 27 members of the United States (US) Congress raises concerns with US secretary of state Antony Blinken on 29 September over Algeria's growing ties with Russia and calls for sanctions against Algerian government officials for arms deals with Moscow. Office National des Statistiques (ONS) (national office of statistics) data indicate that Algeria's inflation rate increased slightly from 9.4% in July to 9.6% in August as a result of skyrocketing prices of commodities globally and their impact on the domestic market.*

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#### French prime minister leads delegation to Algeria

**French** prime minister **Elisabeth Borne** and a delegation of more than a dozen ministers arrived in **Algeria** on 16 September for a two-day trip, the latest attempt to rebuild relations with Algeria, a major oil producer for **Europe**.<sup>1</sup> French publication **Agence France-Presse** said Borne's delegation included officials from the finance, foreign affairs and interior ministries.<sup>2</sup> Algeria's prime minister, **Aimene Benabderrahmane**, welcomed the top-level delegation at the capital's **Houari Boumediene** airport and later presided over a high-level meeting with Borne, mainly addressing economic cooperation.<sup>3</sup> Algerian and French ministers signed a dozen agreements including a "declaration of intent" on tourism, employment and industrial cooperation.<sup>4</sup> Borne was set to meet with Algeria's President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present) on 17 October.

Borne and her team are the latest in a string of top European officials to visit **Algiers** seeking alternatives to **Russian** energy supplies. Algeria has seen rising demand for its energy supplies as demand for Russian supplies wanes.<sup>5</sup> **European Union (EU)** energy commissioner **Kadri Simson** was also expected to visit Algiers on 16 and 17 October.

While Borne noted that **Paris** is not heavily dependent on natural gas, as stated by President **Emmanuel Macron** (2017-present) during his visit in August, she noted that France wants to develop joint projects with Algeria "to increase the efficiency of its gas production capacity, which will increase its export capacity to Europe".<sup>6</sup> Algeria remains Europe's largest gas supplier after Russia and **Norway**, exporting it via the **Medgas** pipeline to **Spain** and **Italy** and shipping it in liquefied form.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bloomberg, 9 October 2022

<sup>2</sup> Agence France-Presse, 9 October 2022

<sup>3</sup> France24, 9 Oct 2022

<sup>4</sup> France24, 9 Oct 2022

<sup>5</sup> Bloomberg, 9 Oct 2022

<sup>6</sup> France24, 9 Oct 2022

<sup>7</sup> Bloomberg, 3 Jul 2022

The high-profile trip led by Borne comes less than two months since Macron concluded a three-day official visit to Algeria on 27 August aimed at ending months of tensions between the two countries over the legacy of its colonial rule (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Sep 2022*).<sup>8</sup> Macron and Tebboune declared a “*new, irreversible dynamic of progress*” in their countries’ relations and signed a joint declaration marking “*the foundation for a renewed partnership through a concrete and constructive approach*”.<sup>9</sup>

Ties between Algiers and Paris were particularly strained in 2021 when Macron questioned Algeria’s existence as a nation before the French occupation and accused its military government of fanning “*hatred towards France*” (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Oct 2021*).<sup>10</sup> Tebboune withdrew his country’s ambassador in retaliation and banned the French military from its airspace. However, diplomatic relations between the two countries have since resumed, as well as overflights to French army bases in **sub-Saharan Africa**.

### Algeria to get higher gas prices in new deals with Italy, and Spain

Algeria is set to benefit from higher natural gas prices after Italy and Spain agreed to pay more for the commodity as the European countries seek to secure sufficient alternatives to make up for shortfalls during the coming northern hemisphere winter.<sup>11</sup> State-owned energy company **Sonatrach** and Italy’s **Enel SpA** concluded a new energy deal on 28 September for higher energy prices, reflecting the surge in energy prices this year. Sonatrach chief executive **Toufik Hakkar**, while announcing the deal with Enel, said that price revisions had been agreed upon with six out of eleven partners but did not name them.<sup>12</sup> Hakkar also disclosed that gas-flows to Italy will increase by 20% this year to approximately 25 billion cubic metres.

Italy has been courting Algeria to increase supplies to Europe to replace Russian gas, and in April, secured a deal to boost energy imports through the **Trans-Med** pipeline.<sup>13</sup> Italy’s then prime minister, **Mario Draghi**, took part in a state visit to Algeria in July to secure more fuel. Italy’s deal with Algeria and another with **Egypt** have seen it cut its reliance on Russian gas to 10% of its demand, down from around 40%.<sup>14</sup>

However, local news publication **Algerie Part** reported on 16 September that Sonatrach is struggling to meet its gas commitments with Italy.<sup>15</sup> Sonatrach reportedly summoned its management to three urgent crisis resolution meetings in the week of 10 September alone.<sup>16</sup> Sonatrach’s agreement with Italy, finalised on 19 July during the fourth **Algerian-Italian Summit** in Algiers, would see Algeria supply Italy with 9 billion cubic metres of gas from November 2022 until the end of December 2023, in addition to previously agreed amounts.<sup>17</sup> While Sonatrach has already supplied Italy with 14 billion cubic metres since the beginning of the year, an amount exceeding initially agreed-on targets, *Algerie Part* says it may not be able to supply the additional amounts within the agreed-on period.<sup>18</sup> The publication, citing a Sonatrach internal audit, said the company can only mobilise around 4 billion cubic metres to the agreement.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Africa News, 28 Aug 2022

<sup>9</sup> Aljazeera, 27 Aug 2022

<sup>10</sup> Aljazeera, 27 Aug 2022

<sup>11</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>12</sup> Algeria Press Service, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>13</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>14</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>15</sup> *Algerie Part*, 16 Sep 2022

<sup>16</sup> *Algerie Part*, 16 Sep 2022

<sup>17</sup> Morocco World News, 18 Sep 2022

<sup>18</sup> *Algerie Part*, 16 Sep 2022; Morocco World News, 18 Sep 2022

<sup>19</sup> *Algerie Part*, 16 Sep 2022; Morocco World News, 18 Sep 2022

Energy minister **Mohamed Arkab**, speaking at the **European Union-Algeria Business Forum** energy summit in Algiers, said on 10 October that his country was “*a trusted supplier*” that always honours its contractual obligations.<sup>20</sup> EU energy commissioner **Kadri Simson** said at the same event:

*“As the relationship with Russia, so far EU’s biggest gas supplier, is irreversibly broken, we are turning to the EU’s reliable suppliers to fill in the gap. In this respect, we are offering Algeria a long-term strategic partnership.”<sup>21</sup>*

Sonatrach and Spanish energy company **Naturgy Energy Group SA** also reached an agreement on 10 October to renew gas supplies to Spain and revise prices upwards.<sup>22</sup> The deal ended a months-long stalemate with the Spanish company over contractual price revisions.<sup>23</sup> Algeria’s deal with Naturgy stands out as the largest price revision this year, as the Spanish company operates a subsea pipeline connecting Algeria and Spain, a major source of energy for the European country.<sup>24</sup>

Naturgy’s agreement is different because it is set by contract rather than spot prices and is revised every three years.<sup>25</sup> While the price has remained confidential, it is reported that Naturgy paid about €38 (\$37) per megawatt (MW) hour for Algerian piped gas between January and April, and the price is expected to increase by €10 (\$9.75) per MW hour under the new contract. Negotiations between Algeria and Naturgy dragged on for months because the company originally requested a severe cut in prices, however, once the conflict in Ukraine disrupted the energy market, Sonatrach pushed for a price increase.<sup>26</sup> The unexpected diplomatic rift between Algiers and **Madrid**, which led to Algeria recalling its ambassador to Spain, also impacted negotiations.

The diplomatic rifts followed Spain’s recognition of **Morocco’s** sovereignty over **Western Sahara** (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Jul 2022*).<sup>27</sup> Spain’s prime minister, **Pedro Sanchez**, officially endorsed Morocco’s autonomy plan for Western Sahara, which Morocco considers its own, on 18 March as “*the most serious, realistic and credible basis for settling the dispute*” (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Apr 2022*).<sup>28</sup> However, the Algeria-backed **Polisario Front** movement demands a sovereign state.<sup>29</sup> Political tensions with Morocco over Western Sahara have also hampered Algeria’s export potential and resulted in the closure of the **Maghreb-Europe** gas pipeline to Spain in October 2021 (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Nov 2021*).<sup>30</sup>

In June, Spain began exporting liquefied gas to Morocco through the Maghreb-Europe pipeline, which historically sent fuel in the opposite direction before Algeria halted flows last year.<sup>31</sup> Following Spain’s announcement on 3 February that it would ship gas to Morocco, Algeria’s energy ministry said on 27 April that it considered the transporting of any amount of Algerian gas to a different destination a breach of contractual obligations that would lead to the termination of the contract binding Sonatrach.<sup>32</sup> Spain’s ecological transition ministry released a

<sup>20</sup> Africa News, 10 Oct 2022

<sup>21</sup> Africa News, 10 Oct 2022

<sup>22</sup> Atalayar, 10 Sep 2022

<sup>23</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>24</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>25</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>26</sup> Atalayar, 10 Sep 2022; Bloomberg, 29 Sep 2022;

<sup>27</sup> Bloomberg, 11 Jul 2022

<sup>28</sup> Reuters, 18 Mar 2022

<sup>29</sup> Reuters, 18 Mar 2022

<sup>30</sup> Middle East Monitor, 20 Apr 2022

<sup>31</sup> Bloomberg, 11 Jul 2022

<sup>32</sup> Middle East Monitor, 28 Apr 2022

statement on 27 April stating that “*in no case will the gas acquired by Morocco come from Algeria*”.<sup>33</sup>

### US Congress members call for sanctions on Algeria

A bipartisan group of 27 members of the **United States (US) Congress** raised concerns in a letter to US secretary of state **Antony Blinken** on 29 September about Algeria’s growing ties with Russia, calling for sanctions against officials in the Algerian government for arms deals with **Moscow**.<sup>34</sup> The group, led by congresswoman **Lisa McClain**, follows a similar call from senator **Marco Rubio** for President **Joseph Biden**’s (2021-present) administration to issue sanctions against Algeria. Algeria reportedly signed an arms deal with Russia in 2021 worth more than \$7 billion, which would see Russia sell its fifth generation Su-57 stealth fighter jets, air defence systems and more to Algiers.<sup>35</sup>

In its letter, the group said that Algeria’s involvement in the purchase of Russian arms would “*clearly be categorized as a significant transaction*” under the **Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)** and questioned the state department’s failure to consider sanctions.<sup>36</sup> The congress members concluded by highlighting the importance for the government to send a “*clear message*” that support for Russia’s President **Vladimir Putin** (2000-2008; 2012-present) and his “*barbaric*” acts will not be “*tolerated*”.<sup>37</sup> Algeria also abstained from a **United Nations (UN)** vote on 12 September condemning Russia’s annexations in Ukraine.

The state department has not responded yet but it is not clear how far it could sanction Algeria, particularly since the government in Algiers is a key US partner in providing alternative energy supplies to Europe as it weans itself off Russian gas.

### Inflation rises yet again...

**Office National des Statistiques (ONS)** (national office of statistics) deputy director **Hamid Zaydouni** announced on 29 September the latest inflation rate as 9.6% year-on-year in August, a slight increase from 9.4% registered in July.<sup>38</sup> The increase was a result of skyrocketing prices of commodities globally and their impact on the domestic market.<sup>39</sup> Algeria is still seeing an unprecedented rise in the prices of various products, with some having increased by more than 100%, amid warnings by consumer protection associations that the increase would weaken people’s purchasing power.<sup>40</sup> The higher prices have affected subsidised goods such as cooking oils, farina and semolina. President Tebboune announced an increase in salaries of teachers, nurses and pensioners, as well as a hike in the unemployment benefit from 2023 in a bid to shield certain groups of the public from inflationary pressure. ONS data indicate that domestic inflation has previously ranged between 3.5% and 7.5% and in 2021, an inflation rate of 7.23% was recorded, which was then the highest in nearly three years.

While there are currently no reports of major social unrest in Algeria due to inflationary pressure, during the year many citizens have taken to social networks to express their frustration at food shortages and rising prices.<sup>41</sup> This is expected to continue despite government’s tight controls on local media. A **World Bank** report on Algeria on 22 December

<sup>33</sup> Euronews, 27 Apr 2022

<sup>34</sup> Morocco World News, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>35</sup> Morocco World News, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>36</sup> Morocco World News, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>37</sup> Morocco World News, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>38</sup> Middle East Monitor, 29 Sep 2022; Word Data, accessed 16 Oct 2022

<sup>39</sup> Anadolu, 29 Sep 2022; Trading Economics, accessed 16 Oct 2022

<sup>40</sup> Middle East Monitor, 29 Sep 2022

<sup>41</sup> Bloomberg, 8 Jan 2022

noted a lack of meaningful reforms, rising poverty, fragile recovery in the socio-economic sector, and social disparities domestically.<sup>42</sup> Many of these issues persist.

### ... as trade surplus expected to increase

Prime minister **Ayman Ben Abdel Rahman** revealed on 25 September that Algeria's trade surplus is expected to exceed \$17 billion by the end of 2022, having reached an estimated \$14 billion at the end of August.<sup>43</sup> Ben Abdel Rahman said Algeria's foreign trade policy aims to "*control and streamline imports, not curb them, as some malicious parties are trying to claim*".<sup>44</sup> He highlighted that non-oil exports amounted to \$4.4 billion at the end of August and expects them to reach \$7 billion by the end of the year. This exceeds the \$5 billion in non-oil exports recorded in 2021, which at the time was the highest recorded in Algeria's history since its independence from France in 1962.<sup>45</sup> Ben Abdel Rahman also noted that foreign exchange reserves "*recorded a significant increase*" this year "*exceeding percentages that were predicted*", however, he did not disclose details of their current value.

Higher government revenues will allow the government to increase funding on key reforms and address social disparities domestically. Government finances will be less strained this year after parliament voted in November 2021 to wind back the subsidy system.<sup>46</sup> The government has for decades subsidised most goods from bread and milk to fuel and electricity, at a cost of roughly \$17 billion per year (*ARC Briefing Algeria Jan 2022*).<sup>47</sup> However, in November, the government announced plans to curb spending on food subsidies once a compensation mechanism for the neediest Algerian households takes effect at a date yet to be determined (*ARC Briefing Algeria Dec 2021*).<sup>48</sup> State subsidies have long helped to maintain social peace but have strained state budgets as energy revenues have fallen.<sup>49</sup> The subsidy system was funded by energy exports, which account for about 95% of foreign revenues and 60% of Algeria's budget.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> World Bank, 22 Dec 2022

<sup>43</sup> Middle East Monitor, 26 Sep 2022

<sup>44</sup> Algeria Presse Service, 25 Sep 2022

<sup>45</sup> Middle East Monitor, 26 Sep 2022

<sup>46</sup> Bloomberg, 8 Jan 2022

<sup>47</sup> Bloomberg, 8 Jan 2022

<sup>48</sup> Bloomberg, 8 Jan 2022

<sup>49</sup> France24, 24 Nov 2021

<sup>50</sup> France24, 24 Nov 2021

## Planner

1-2 Nov 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** Arab League Summit;  
 Nov 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** **Desert Shield 2022 Russia-Algeria** anti-terrorism exercises.  
 2022 **Moscow (Russia)** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to visit Moscow;

## Chronology

16 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. Fourth committee of the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** adopts a resolution reiterating its support for the political process conducted under the exclusive auspices of the UN for the settlement of the regional dispute over **Western Sahara**;

16 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *France24*. **French** prime minister **Elisabeth Borne** arrives in **Algeria** with a top-level delegation for a visit aimed at improving ties with the former French colony and major gas exporter;

16 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Yahoo Finance*. Energy minister **Mohamed Arkab** says the latest decision of the **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** to cut output was “historic” and aims to stabilise markets;

13 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Energy Ministry*. **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** secretary **Haitham Al Ghais** will visit Algeria from 15-17 October to discuss global oil issues and medium and long-term perspectives;

13 Oct 2022 **New York (United States)** *Morocco World News*. Algeria abstains from a **United Nations (UN)** vote condemning **Russia’s** annexation of areas of **Ukraine**;

13 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Energy Ministry*. Energy minister **Mohamed Arkab** holds discussions with **Russia’s** deputy prime minister, **Alexsander Novak**, on the status of cooperation between the two countries in the energy sector;

13 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Aljazeera*. Rival **Palestinian** factions **Fatah** and **Hamas** meet in **Algiers** for talks mediated by the **Algerian** government and agree on a reconciliation deal that aims to resolve 15 years of discord through new elections in the occupied Palestinian territories;

10 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Atalayar*. State-owned energy company **Sonatrach** and **Spanish** energy company **Naturgy** reach an agreement to renew gas supplies to Spain and revise prices upwards;

10 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Atalaya*. Government is seeking to solve the housing crisis through several measures, announcing the delivery of 160,000 housing units;

10 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Africa News*. **European Union (EU)** energy commissioner **Kadri Simson** hails Algeria for its “long-term strategic partnership” with the EU as the bloc turns to **Africa’s** largest gas exporter to fill a gap left by **Russian** supplies;

8 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Live Mint*. **India** is reportedly in talks with **Angola** and **Algeria** to secure liquefied natural gas (LNG) on long-term contracts;

6 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Morocco World News*. **United Nations** secretary-general **Antonio Guterres** highlights in a report on the **Western Sahara** that the **Tindouf** camps in **Algeria** are experiencing a range of humanitarian crises, including malnutrition, lack of security, healthcare, quality education, energy and shelter;

6 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. **Switzerland**-based NGO **Al-Karama** denounces the use of counterterrorism laws against human rights defenders and journalists by Algeria, saying they violate their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;

4 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. **Judicial Council** upholds the decision to jail **Said Bouteflika**, the brother and former adviser of the late president **Abdelaziz Bouteflika**, for eight years for secret funding of the presidential elections which were cancelled in April 2019;

1 Oct 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Aljazeera*. **Moroccan** government calls on **German** sports apparel giant **Adidas** to withdraw its new jersey collection for Algeria's national football team, accusing the company of appropriating "*Moroccan cultural heritage*";

29 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. **United States (US) Congress** bipartisan group sends a letter to secretary of state **Antony Blinken** raising concerns over Algeria's growing ties with **Russia** and calling for sanctions against officials in the Algerian regime for arms deals with **Moscow**;

29 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. Inflation rate in Algeria is recorded at 9.6% at the end of August, amid the rise in the prices of basic commodities globally and its impact on local markets;

28 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Bloomberg*. State-owned energy producer **Sonatrach Group** concludes a deal with **Italy's Enel SpA** saying it will soon announce one with **Spanish** energy company **Naturgy Energy Group SA** for contractual price revisions;

28 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Anadolu*. State-owned energy company **Sonatrach** announces its gas production is expected to increase by 10 billion cubic metres in 2023;

26 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. Algeria's foreign minister, **Ramtane Lamamra**, expresses his country's support for granting **Palestine** full membership at the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)**, seconding the request made by Palestinian president **Mahmoud Abbas**;

27 Sep 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)** *North Africa Post*. Morocco's foreign affairs minister, **Nasser Bourita**, receives justice minister, **Abderrachid Tebbi**, emissary of Algeria's President **Abdelmajid Tebboune**, who handed Bourita the letter of invitation to King **Mohammed VI** to attend the **Arab Summit**, scheduled for 1 and 2 November in Algeria;

26 Sep 2022 **Brussels (Belgium)** *Middle East Monitor*. **European Parliament** member **Inmaculada Rodríguez-Piñero** denounces "*the repeated violation*" by **Algeria** of its trade commitments to **Spain** and the **European Union (EU)**;

25 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Catholic News Agency*. **Church in Algeria** announces the country has ordered its aid organisation, **Caritas Algeria**, to cease its operations;

25 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. Prime minister **Ayman Ben Abdel Rahman** says **Algeria** expects its foreign trade surplus to exceed \$17 billion by the end of the year and for exports of non-oil products to reach \$7 billion;

24 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *La Razon*. **Spain's** foreign affairs minister, **Jose Manuel Albares**, says Spain's position on **Western Sahara** remains unchanged;

24 Sep 2022 **New York (United States)** *Chinese Foreign Ministry*. **Chinese** state councillor and foreign minister **Wang Yi** meets with **Algerian** counterpart **Ramtane Lamamra** on the side lines of the **United Nations General Assembly**;

21 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. **Algeria** launches a campaign to promote its candidacy for a non-permanent seat at the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** for the term 2024-2025, with elections scheduled to be held during the UN General Assembly in June 2023;

21 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Bloomberg*. Algeria expects natural gas exports to **Italy** to climb by 20% in 2022;

21 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *ABC*. Third graders returning to primary school will be taught English and French as a new academic year starts, in a symbolic step toward taking Algeria further away from its past as a French colony;

16 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Atalayar*. Algerian media outlet **Algerie Part** reports that state-owned energy company **Sonatrach** is struggling to meet the terms of its gas commitments to **Italy**;

17 Sep 2022 **Geneva (Switzerland)** *North Africa Post*. **United States (US)** delegation to the 51st session of the **Human Rights Council** in **Geneva** and several participating non-governmental organisations (NGOs) criticise the status of human rights in **Algeria**;

17 Sep 2022 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. **United States (US) Republican** senator and vice chairman of the **Senate Select Committee on Intelligence**, **Marco Rubio**, calls for sanctions on **Algeria's** purchasing of **Russian** weapons.

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