



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



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Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

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DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW

DPG West Asia Review contains major developments in West Asia of strategic relevance to India, compiled from open source media. To subscribe please [click here](#).

Your comments and feedback can be addressed to Sanket Joshi at sanket@dpg.org.in.

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Abstract

Amidst US withdrawal from Afghanistan, China is looking to increase its influence in the Middle East. Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Iraqi PM Barham Salih. He reiterated Beijing's support for Tehran's "legitimate demands" in nuclear negotiations [Vienna talks], while expressing confidence that "no matter how the international and regional situation changes, China will unswervingly develop friendly relations with Iran". With regards to Iraq, President Xi stressed that "China will support country's reconstruction efforts". Even as China's engagement in the region increases, analysts are concerned at Taliban's haul of US weapons and equipment left behind in Afghanistan that has the potential to destabilize the region including China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region.

Continuing India's deepening of strategic partnership with Israel, Prime Minister Modi spoke with his Israeli counterpart Naftali Bennett on August 16. "They reviewed all areas of India-Israel cooperation and agreed on the tremendous potential of bilateral strategic partnership, especially in technology and innovation". India's defence partnership with the Gulf countries has strengthened considerably over the past few years. As a result, India and Qatar held second edition of joint naval exercise, 'Zair-Al-Bahr', while India and Bahrain held Passage Exercise (PASSEX) in the Gulf.

Qatar is emerging as the first point of contact for nations who want to engage the Taliban [Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan]. In light of this, India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar met Qatar's Foreign Minister in Doha to "exchange views on Afghanistan".

As regards trade and economy, Indian company 'DCM Shriram' is investing USD 1 million in Turkish drone maker 'Zyrone Dynamics'. DCM Shriram stressed that "the partnership is more than just an

investment; it is about creating a global UAV company for various applications in civilian and military fields". Zyrone Dynamics spoke about this partnership "creating products for civilian use, especially for cargo transportation". In another development, India's SVP Group owned subsidiary SV Pittie Sohar Textiles has commenced commercial operations at its mega textile plant with investment of USD 150 million in Oman's 'Sohar Free Trade Zone'.

In a development impacting Indian migrant workers, Indian Ambassador to Kuwait met director of Kuwait's Public Authority for Manpower and expressed New Delhi's interest in providing more domestic workers to the gulf country. Meanwhile, Indian Ambassador to Egypt highlighted an upward trajectory in bilateral trade.

In a boost for Indian tourists, UAE and Kuwait have allowed Indian passport holders to enter the country on a tourist visa provided that they haven't visited or been in India in the last 14 days.

On the energy front, as noted in the earlier issue of West Asia Review, India had overhauled its strategic petroleum reserves policy to boost private investment. As a result, India has begun selling oil from its strategic petroleum reserves to state-run refiners.

Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi visited Tehran and met Iran's President and Foreign Minister. Tehran informed Tokyo that "Iran is not against negotiations" but the "Americans must answer to the world's public opinion [as to] why they did not implement their commitments under the JCPOA and exited this international accord". Iran has also called on Japan to release its funds frozen in the country because of the US sanctions.

On the US-Iran relations, Washington and its European allies called on Iran to "halt nuclear escalations" as the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] claimed that "Iran has made progress in its work on enriched uranium metal". US Department of State asserted that "Iran

has no credible need to produce uranium metal, which has direct relevance to nuclear weapons development". Meanwhile, Iranian Defence Ministry declared that Tehran will "continue its missile program and expand its defence efforts beyond the borders of the country". This could be seen as a message of deterrence to the US, Israel, and the West. In another development, reportedly US shot down Iranian drone in Eastern Syria. The US also showed concerns about Iran sending more sophisticated weapons to Yemen's Houthi rebels amid ceasefire efforts by Riyadh and Washington.

Amid growing regional tensions, President Biden will host new Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett at 'The White House' on August 26. The two leaders will discuss "critical issues related to regional and global security, including Iran".

Former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani who fled the country on August 15 landed in UAE to seek refuge as the Taliban declared Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. US withdrawal from Afghanistan risks emboldening radical Islamic terrorist organizations worldwide. Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah are gloating over Taliban's victory and "downfall of America". Reportedly, even the Gulf Arab Nations are jittery about Taliban's rule in Afghanistan, but may seek pragmatic relations in future. Saudi Arabia and UAE had recognized Taliban's rule in Afghanistan from 1996-2001. It remains to be seen if they could exert religious and economic clout to moderate Taliban.

Links to major developments in West Asia of strategic relevance to India, compiled from open source media, can be found below.

Bahrain

[Passage Exercise \(PASSEX\) Held Between India and Bahrain Ships in the Gulf](#)

August 19, 2021, India in Bahrain Official Twitter Handle

Rear Admiral Ajay Kochhar, Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet, Indian Navy called on Commander, RBNF and discussed Navy to Navy partnership. Later, a Planning conference for exercise at sea between both Navies was held between the operational planning teams.

[Bahrain Allows Airport Use for Afghanistan Evacuations](#)

August 21, 2021, Arab News

The Kingdom of Bahrain has said it is "allowing flights to make use of Bahrain's transit facilities" amid the evacuations from Afghanistan.

Egypt

[India-Egypt Trade Exchange Grows to \\$1.10bn in Q1 2021, Despite COVID-19 Impact: Indian Ambassador](#)

August 15, 2021, Daily News Egypt

Trade exchange between India and Egypt increased to \$1.10bn in the first quarter of 2021, compared to \$ 968.6m in Q4 of 2020, which shows a steady improvement, and promises optimistic trade figures in the future, according to India's Ambassador to Egypt Ajit Gupte.

[Egypt Tests Chinese Electric Vehicles E70 on Streets Ahead of Local Production](#)

August 21, 2021, Ahram Online

Egypt has received 13 E70 electric cars from Chinese Dongfeng Motor Corporation to be tried out on the streets of the capital as part of an agreement with El-Nasr Automotive to produce such vehicles.

[Egypt, Israel Discuss Liquefying Israeli Gas at Egyptian Plants](#)

August 09, 2021, Reuters

Egypt's petroleum minister discussed in a phone call with Israel's energy minister "future plans" for Israeli gas to be liquefied at Egyptian natural gas liquefaction plants for re-export.

[Ahead of PM Bennett's Visit to Washington, Israel Tightens Cooperation with Egypt](#)

August 20, 2021, AL-Monitor

The invitation to visit Cairo and the agreement over the transfer of Qatari money to Gaza are important milestones for Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett ahead of his visit next week to the White House.

Iraq

[What the Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan Means for Volatile Iraq](#)

August 21, 2021, Arab News

The swift demise of the Kabul government has raised the spectre of similar power grabs in fragile Middle East states. Analysts believe Iran-backed Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi will not benefit further from toppling the Baghdad government.

[As US Turns Inward, China's Xi Jinping Pledges Support to Iran and Iraq](#)

August 19, 2021, South China Morning Post

China is pushing for a bigger role in the Middle East, with President Xi Jinping engaging the Iranian and Iraqi leaders with pledges of help, as the United States beats a hasty retreat from Afghanistan and remains in a deadlock with Iran.

[UN Chief Ready to Talk to Taliban Once Leadership is Clear](#)

August 19, 2021, Middle East Monitor

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that he is ready to speak with the Taliban once the hard line group's leadership is clear. "I am ready to speak myself when it is clear with whom I should speak, for what purpose," he told reporters at the UN's New York headquarters.

Iran

[Iran: Japanese FM Discusses Nuclear Deal, Afghanistan Turmoil](#)

August 21, 2021, AL Jazeera

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi is in Tehran for top-level meetings on a range of issues including Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers and the developing situation in Afghanistan.

[Iran Says It is Expanding Defense Beyond Borders, Will Continue Missile Program](#)

August 21, 2021, The Times of Israel

The Iranian Defense Ministry said that it was expanding its defense efforts beyond the borders of the country, in an apparent message of deterrence to Israel and the West, as hopes for a return to the 2015 nuclear deal continue to fade.

[US Calls on Iran to Halt 'Nuclear Escalations'](#)

August 17, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iran has made progress in its work on enriched uranium metal, the UN nuclear watchdog said in a report to member states, despite Western warnings that such work threatens talks on reviving the Iran nuclear deal.

[Iranian Ambassador to India Roots for Direct Flight between Hyderabad and Iran](#)

August 20, 2021, The Times of India

In a bid to improve connectivity with Hyderabad and boost tourism and trade relations, Iran's Ambassador to New Delhi urged India to approve direct flights connecting Hyderabad with Iran.

[Dry Fruit Supplies Hit Badly as Taliban Halts Trade with India](#)

August 20, 2021, Hindustan Times

Dry fruit supplies in the country have been hit badly after the Taliban halted trade with India. India imported 85% of dry fruits from Afghanistan in the last financial year.

[The Middle East is Running Out of Water, and Parts of it Are Becoming Uninhabitable](#)

August 22, 2021, CNN

The region has witnessed persistent drought and temperatures so high that they are barely fit for human life. Add climate change to water mismanagement and overuse, and projections for the future of water here are grim.

Israel

[PM Modi Speaks with Israeli PM, Discusses Potential of Strategic Ties](#)

August 16, 2021, Mint

PM Modi spoke with his Israeli counterpart Naftali Bennett to congratulate him on his appointment as prime minister. The two prime ministers also reviewed all areas of bilateral cooperation and agreed on the tremendous potential of the strategic partnership.

[President Biden and Israeli PM Set to Discuss Iran Strategy at Meeting Next Week at The White House](#)

August 18, 2021, Reuters

"The President [Biden] and Prime Minister Bennett will discuss critical issues related to regional and global security, including Iran," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki in a statement announcing the leaders' first in-person meeting at the White House on Aug. 26.

[CIA Director Warns Israel Against China Investments](#)

August 19, 2021, Middle East Monitor

CIA Director William Burns has warned Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett of the dangers of Chinese investments in Israel, particularly in the IT sector and major infrastructure projects.

[Israeli, US Air Forces Complete First-of-a-kind Joint Drill in Southern Israel](#)

August 10, 2021, The Times of Israel

'Desert Eagle' exercise between IAF and US Air Force Central Command comes as ties are set to move under US military's Mideast-focused CENTCOM.

[Hamas Praises Taliban for Causing American 'Downfall' in Afghanistan](#)

August 16, 2021, The Times of Israel

Hamas terror group praised the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, calling it "a victory that came as the culmination of more than 20 years of struggle". In a statement, the terror group said it "congratulates the Afghani Muslim nation for the downfall of the American occupation in all Afghani territory."

[Israel Strikes Hamas Weapons Sites in Gaza After Violent Demonstrations](#)

August 21, 2021, Sky News

Israel bombed Palestinian militant weapons sites in the Gaza Strip in response to violent demonstrations at the perimeter fence, the IDF said.

[As Taliban Parades Captured Weapons, US Still Trying to Gauge Scope of Damage](#)

August 21, 2021, The Times of Israel

Washington is still attempting to gauge the scope of United States weaponry and technology that have fallen into the hands of the Taliban following Afghanistan's fall to the militants, though it is believed to be considerable.

[Taliban Chiefs, Including al-Qaeda-linked Terrorist, in Kabul to Talk New Government](#)

August 21, 2021, The Times of Israel

Khalil Haqqani, who has a \$5 million US bounty on him, has been put in charge of security in Kabul as President Biden claims the terror group is 'gone' from Afghanistan.

[Taliban Spokesman 'Did Not Address Media Identified as Israeli'](#)

August 18, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Suhail Shaheen was heard answering questions about the rights of minorities, including Jews, the London-based news website said. He gave his answer to an Israeli reporter, who did not identify himself as such.

Jordan

[Jordan King Meets Palestinian President in Attempt to Revive Israel Talks](#)

August 16, 2021, Ynet

Prompted by Jordanian King's recent U.S. visit, King Abdullah shares with Abbas 'his impressions and readings' from recent meeting with Biden in bid to initiate trust-building moves.

Kuwait

[India Ready to Provide More Domestic Workers to Kuwait: Indian Ambassador](#)

August 19, 2021, Kuwait Times

India is ready to provide more domestic workers as it wishes to increase the number of its manpower in the Gulf state, Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George said. The envoy made his statement during a meeting with the acting director of Kuwait's Public Authority for Manpower Dr Mubarak Al-Jafour.

[Secretary Blinken Says 12 Nations to Host Afghan Evacuees](#)

August 21, 2021, The Hindu

Secretary of State Antony Blinken says 13 countries have thus far agreed to at least temporarily host at-risk Afghans evacuated from Afghanistan and a dozen more have agreed to serve as transit points for evacuees, including Americans and others.

Lebanon

[Hezbollah's Nasrallah Gloats over US Defeat While Turning Lebanon into Afghanistan](#)

August 21, 2021, Zawya

Nasrallah drapes himself in the robes of national savior for bringing ships full of Iranian diesel to Lebanese shores.

[Lebanon Raises Fuel Prices by 66 Per Cent as it Tries to Ease Shortages](#)

August 22, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The Lebanese government said that it was raising gasoline prices by 66 per cent in a partial reduction of fuel subsidies as it seeks to ease crippling shortages that have brought the country to a standstill.

[US Mulls Transporting Egyptian Gas to Lebanon](#)

August 20, 2021, Middle East Monitor

US decision comes hours after Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah announced that the first Iranian fuel ship was on its way to Lebanon, warning Israel and the US against "stopping the shipment."

Oman

[India's SV Pittie Sohar Textiles Commences Commercial Operations at Oman Plant](#)

August 17, 2021, Outlook India

Compact cotton yarn manufacturer SVP Global announced that its subsidiary SV Pittie Sohar Textiles has commenced commercial operations at its mega textile plant in Oman. The group has invested USD 150 million (around Rs 1,100 crore) in setting up 1.5 lakh spindles and 3,500 rotors facility at Sohar Free Trade Zone in Oman, the company said in a statement.

[Afghanistan: Oman Grand Mufti Hails Taliban Takeover as 'Clear Victory'](#)

August 16, 2021, Middle East Eye

The grand mufti of Oman, Ahmad bin Hamad al-Khalili, issued a statement congratulating the Afghan people for Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.

Qatar

[India and Qatar Conduct Joint Naval Exercise in Persian Gulf](#)

August 17, 2021, India Today

The second edition of the joint naval exercise, Zair-Al-Bahr, between the Indian Navy and Qatar Naval Force was conducted between August 9 and 14 in the Persian Gulf.

[Qatar Sets October 2 for First Legislative Elections](#)

August 22, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Qatar's first legislative polls for two-thirds of the advisory Shura Council will be held on October 2, according to a decree issued by the ruling emir.

[Qatar's Taliban Efforts Position Doha as a Key Mediator: Analysts](#)

August 20, 2021, AL Jazeera

Qatar's move to act as a mediator between the Taliban's political leaders and former Afghan officials has solidified the Gulf state as a regional power broker. Over the past year, Qatar has hosted talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, and before that, between the Taliban and the United States.

[EAM Jaishankar Meets Qatar Foreign Minister, Exchange Views on Afghanistan](#)

August 20, 2021, Mint

Indian foreign minister S Jaishankar stopped off in Doha on his way back home from the US against the backdrop of the Taliban overrunning Afghanistan. Qatar has been host to the Taliban's political office in Doha since 2013 and is seen as wielding influence over the group.

[President Biden Thanks Qatar's Emir for Help in Afghanistan - The White House](#)

August 20, 2021, Reuters

U.S. President Joe Biden thanked Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani in a call for the country's "generous support" as Washington evacuates thousands of people from Afghanistan, the White House said

Saudi Arabia

[U.S. Signals It Will Release Some Still-Secret Files on Saudi Arabia and 9/11](#)

August 09, 2021, The New York Times

The Biden administration, under pressure from families of victims of the Sept. 11 attacks, said that it intended to disclose some long-classified documents that the families think could detail connections between the government of Saudi Arabia and the hijackers who carried out the attacks.

[OPEC+ Sees No Need to Meet U.S. Call for More Supply, Sources Say](#)

August 16, 2021, Reuters

OPEC and its allies, including Russia, believe oil markets do not need more oil than they plan to release in the coming months, despite U.S. pressure to add supplies to check an oil price rise.

[Minister: Israel Holds Direct Contacts with Saudis, Others in Gulf to Fight Iran](#)

August 10, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israel is in direct contact with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states combating the influence of Iran in the region, Regional Cooperation Minister Issawi Frej said.

[Saudi Arabia Looks for Free Trade Agreement with 11 Countries in Exports Push](#)

August 20, 2021, Arab News

Saudi Arabia is looking for more trading partners under free trade agreements as the country aims at increasing non-oil exports share in GDP. FTA target countries are China, India, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the US.

[Saudi Arabia Remains China's Top Oil Supplier, Malaysian Supplies Triple](#)

August 20, 2021, NASDAQ

Saudi Arabia remained China's top crude oil supplier for the ninth month in July but its crude arrivals fell 10% on the month, while Russian imports slipped by just 4%. Shipments of oil from Iran and Venezuela have been reported as originating from Malaysia after cargoes were transferred in Malaysian waters to avoid U.S. sanctions.

[Gulf Arabs Jittery About Taliban Takeover But May Seek Pragmatic Ties](#)

August 20, 2021, Reuters

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, among the few who recognised the Taliban's radical 1996-2001 rule in Afghanistan, will likely take a pragmatic approach to its return to power despite fears it could embolden militant Islam abroad.

[Hamas Thrown Out of Saudi Arabia – Into the Arms of Iran and the Taliban](#)

August 22, 2021, Israel Hayom

As Riyadh continues its attempts to show the US that it has thrown off its problematic past as a supporter of terrorism, Hamas makes its position as an ally of Iran and its satellites – including the Taliban – increasingly clear.

Syria

[Four Hezbollah Members Reportedly Killed in Alleged Israeli Air-Strike in Syria](#)

August 22, 2021, Jewish News Syndicate

Lebanese Defense Minister Zeina Akar condemned the alleged Israeli attack, saying that it “blatantly violated Lebanon’s airspace at low altitude, causing a state of panic among citizens”. She called on the United Nations to prevent Israel from launching airstrikes against Syria from Lebanese airspace.

[US Forces Down Iranian Drone in Eastern Syria – Report](#)

August 22, 2021, The Times of Israel

US-led forces in Syria shot down a drone, reported to be Iranian, that was deemed a threat, US army said.

Turkey

[India's DCM Shriram Buys 30 Per Cent Stake in Turkish Drone Maker Zyrone Dynamics](#)

August 20, 2021, The Week

DCM Shriram is investing \$1 million in Zyrone Dynamics, taking a 30 per cent stake in the company. Murat Kanber, co-founder of Zyrone Dynamics, was quoted by Turkey's Anadolu Agency as saying, "Both sides' expectation is the creation of products for civilian use, especially for cargo transportation... Now Zyrone will sell its products to India and its neighbours in the Asian market, after which it also hopes to export drones to Europe and Australia."

[Turkey, Pakistan Agree on Close Coordination in Afghanistan](#)

August 22, 2021, Daily Sabah

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu discussed the latest situation in Afghanistan over the phone with his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mahmood Qureshi, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

[Turkey Reinforces Border to Block Any Afghan Migrant Wave](#)

August 23, 2021, Reuters

Afghans who manage to make the weeks-long journey through Iran on foot to the Turkish border face a three-metre high wall, ditches or barbed wire as Turkish authorities step up efforts to block any refugee influx into the country.

[Turkey Hails 'Beginning of a New Era' with the UAE](#)

August 19, 2021, Middle East Eye

For the last five years, Ankara has publicly blamed the UAE for financing 2016 coup plotters in Turkey or aggressively undermining Turkish interests in Libya. Recent meeting between President Erdogan and UAE's NSA is being hailed as "the beginning of a new era".

UAE

[Afghan President Ghani Latest Leader on the Run to Turn Up in UAE](#)

August 19, 2021, Associated Press

Afghanistan's president Ghani, driven out by the Taliban, is the latest leader on the run to turn up in the United Arab Emirates. Others who found refuge here include Spain's disgraced former king and two Thai prime ministers.

[Gulf States Call for Calm in Afghanistan Following the Taliban Takeover](#)

August 17, 2021, AL-Monitor

Gulf States are calling for peace and dialogue in Afghanistan after the Taliban seized control of the capital, Kabul, amid the US military withdrawal.

[Indian Govt Starts Selling Oil from Strategic Reserves after Policy Shift](#)

August 18, 2021, Mint

India has begun selling oil from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) to state-run refiners as it implements a new policy to commercialise its federal storage by leasing out space, three sources familiar with the matter said.

[UAE, Kuwait Issue New Travel Rules for Indian Passengers](#)

August 22, 2021, Mint

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) issued new travel guidelines for Indians as it looks to open up arrivals in a stagnated manner. This comes days after Kuwait decided to resume commercial flights with India and Egypt, among other countries, while adhering to the Covid-19 measures.

[Russia's New Jet Fighter Aims to Rival U.S. in Air—and on Geopolitical Map](#)

August 09, 2021, The Wall Street Journal

At Russia's premier expo for military aircraft in July, Russian President Vladimir Putin inspected a prototype jet that is designed to take on more than enemy fighters. The lightweight stealth plane is also meant to cause geopolitical headaches for the U.S.

[Dubai Expo in Focus as UAE Racks up \\$700m of Trade with Israel Since the Abraham Accords](#)

August 13, 2021, Reuters

Israel and the United Arab Emirates, which normalised relations a year ago, are looking to Dubai's Expo world fair in October to boost bilateral trade, which now stands at around \$712 million.

Yemen

[Al-Qaeda-linked Groups in Syria, Yemen Welcome Taliban Victory in Afghanistan](#)

August 20, 2021, The Arab Weekly

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan following two decades of US occupation risks emboldening jihadists worldwide as al-Qaeda-connected groups in Syria and Yemen have already welcomed the Taliban's victory, in a sign they could be emboldened to ratchet up their activities in the period to come.

[Iran Sending More Weapons to Yemen's Houthis amid Cease-fire Effort: Pentagon](#)

August 11, 2021, AL-Monitor

Tehran has been sending increasingly complex weapons to Yemen's Houthi rebels even as Iranian officials have engaged in separate talks with the United States and Saudi Arabia about reducing tensions in the region, a top Pentagon official said.

[Iranian Military Expert Reportedly Killed in Yemen's Marib](#)

August 21, 2021, Middle East Monitor

An Iranian military expert and nine other people were killed in a Saudi-led airstrike in central Yemen, a Yemeni minister said. The airstrike targeted a Houthi position in Sirwah district, west of Marib province.

[Iran Denies Military Adviser Killed in Yemen](#)

August 21, 2021, Xinhua

Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied that the country's military adviser was killed in Yemen. Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh dismissed the recent remarks by a member of Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's government as "false" concerning the killing of an Iranian citizen in Yemen's conflicts.



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