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Muthanna Faiq Maree

*Tikrit University, Iraq., muthannaf@tu.edu.iq*

Sura Hussain Khader

*Tikrit University, Iraq*

Yasir Ahmed Khalaf

*Tikrit University, Iraq.*

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## US military existence in Iraq: tasks and challenges

\***Muthanna Faiq Maree**, *College of Political Science, Tikrit University, Tikrit, Iraq.*  
muthannaf@tu.edu.iq

**Sura Hussain Khader** *College of Political Science, Tikrit University, Tikrit, Iraq.*

**Yasir Ahmed Khalaf** *College of Dentistry, Tikrit University, Tikrit, Iraq.*

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### Abstract

The US military presence in Iraq has a peculiarity that differs from what is found in other countries of the Middle East, as this presence began after the US occupation of Iraq in April 2003 and passed through various stages dictated by the repercussions of the war on Iraq and the developments of security and political events that contributed to crystallizing the nature and extent of this The presence from one stage to another, unlike the US military presence in the rest of the countries that arose based on treaties and agreements between the United States of America and each of these countries separately according to the request of their governments and was not a result of the use of force and war, as is the case in Iraq.

**Keywords:** Iraq, USA, USA Exitance, security, tasks, challenges.

### 1. Introduction

The direct military existence of the United States of America in many countries and regions of the world constitutes one of the tools of its global strategy since its emergence as an effective force in the international arena, and its soldiers and forces have spread in various countries in military bases, including permanent and temporary, and these forces are run by several leaders that specialize in each command in a specific region The number of US forces deployed around the world is estimated at 200,000. Of them between 60 and 70 thousand personnel in the Middle East region alone, and their existence is concentrated in several countries, including Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Israel and Djibouti, Tunisia, Morocco and Iraq.

As for Iraq, the US military existence in it has a specificity that differs from what exists in other countries in the Middle East, as this existence began after the US occupation of Iraq in April 2003 and passed through different stages dictated by the repercussions of the war on Iraq and the developments of security and political events that contributed to crystallizing the nature and size of this The

existence from one stage to another, unlike the US military existence in the rest of the countries, which arose based on treaties and agreements between the United States of America and each of these countries separately according to the request of their governments and was not the result of the use of force and war as is the case in Iraq

### **The importance of study:**

The importance of the study comes, whether in the conceptual or applied framework, which examines the importance of the American military presence on the one hand, and researches the implications of the American presence and withdrawal from Iraq, especially since Iraq is still fighting armed organizations. Non-state actors as well as in dealing with them, with the identification of the outputs that came with it and the impact of the role played by the United States of America towards issues, all these factors contributed in one way or another to the achievement of the strategic interests of America.

### **The problematic point:**

In this research, we try to develop an analytical framework on how to employ the ingredients and face the challenges in the stage of the American military presence in Iraq and the challenges that represented a major obstacle. There are a set of questions raised by the topic of research or trying to answer them:

- How did the American military existence in Iraq emerge and develop?
- What are its tasks and goals?
- What are the challenges that he may face in the Iraqi arena?

### **Study's hypothesis:**

The research is based on the premise that the future presence of the American presence in Iraq is linked to the fate of international and regional events, as well as the American and Iraqi interior. The continuation of military performance is relative isolation in many global issues

### **Study's Methodology:**

The research relied on the induction approach for all the data that drive the American military presence in Iraq, and the descriptive approach was adopted to describe the components of American power, its sources, and its global role towards international issues based on it, down to the method of deduction in the ability of the American strategy in how to harmonize between goals and possibilities to achieve what it aspires to.

### **Study's Structure:**

The research consists of an introduction, four demands, and a conclusion. It deals with the **first requirement** about the emergence and development of the US existence in Iraq as for the **second requirement**, it deals with US military bases in Iraq as for the **third requirement** Tasks and Goals As for the **fourth requirement** The challenges of the US military existence in Iraq

Through the answer, we will have given a clear picture of the US military existence in Iraq, through the following:

### **Section 1: the emergence and development of the US existence in Iraq**

After the United States of America launched the war on Iraq in March 2003 and was able to occupy it on April 9, 2003, then US President George W. Bush announced the end of the so-called "Iraq liberation war", and then on May 22, 2003 Security Council Resolution 1483 was issued at the request of An American ruled at the time that the American and allied forces in the war were the occupying forces of Iraq. (El-Hajj, 2010)

The American military existence in it took the direct form and the static military positioning. The American forces were distributed in all parts and regions of Iraq and their numbers increased until they reached about 170 thousand soldiers in the year 2007 in light of the deterioration of the security situation, the occurrence of sectarian violence and terrorist operations. 570 large, medium and small fortified bases, and these bases were often camps for the former Iraqi army and fortified presidential palaces, and were equipped with warfare and logistical services suitable for the American forces in light of the deterioration of security and the attacks they faced by many armed groups that appeared at that stage. (Saqr Center for Strategic Studies, 2010)

In November 2008, the United States of America signed the Iraq security agreement to regulate the military withdrawal from Iraq, whose first article stipulated the "scope and purpose" that: "This agreement sets out the main provisions and requirements that regulate the temporary existence of US forces in Iraq, their activities there, and their withdrawal from Iraq." (America, 2008) This agreement paved the way for setting a schedule for the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq at the end of 2011, the year in which there were approximately 39,000 American soldiers dispersed over 18 military bases in a number of Iraqi provinces. (Saeed, 2020)

Just as the two countries signed in 2008 the strategic framework agreement for friendship and cooperation relations between them, which talked about a strategic partnership between the two countries and defined the form of trade,

investment, diplomatic, cultural and security and military cooperation between the United States of America and Iraq. (America, 2008) Although the situation in Iraq at that stage largely indicates the need for Iraq to assist the American forces and the necessity for their direct continuation in the Iraqi arena and perhaps for many years in order to ensure the preservation of security and stability in Iraq, the facts of the American and Iraqi arenas at the political level have led to the trend towards The completion of the American military withdrawal from Iraq, which was described by then US President Barack Obama in his speech at the White House, saying: "Now is the time to turn the page" and he meant the Iraq page. (Madi, 2010)

But it wasn't long before the American forces withdrew from Iraq until the Iraqi government submitted an official request to the United States of America to help its forces in the war against terrorist groups after ISIS managed to seize large areas of the country in June 2014, and indeed the American forces began to return to Iraq, and this return came based on what was approved by the strategic framework agreement between the two countries in the third section, "Defense and Security Cooperation" from it, and the agreement between them regarding the withdrawal of the United States forces from Iraq, from which the fourth article indicated in its first paragraph that "the Iraqi government requests temporary assistance from the forces The United States to support it in its efforts to maintain security and stability in Iraq, including cooperation in conducting operations against al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups and outlaw groups and the remnants of the previous regime. Iraq to fight ISIS. (Diab, 2010) , Distributed between the coach and a specialist technician and adviser to military and security forces and special assignments in many locations and military bases in Iraq. (Attaya, 2018)

Despite the announcement of the defeat Daesh militarily in Iraq by the end of 2017, but the US military existence in Iraq remained in place in the continuation of many of his duties, and added to the US troops pulled out of Syria, amounting to nearly 2130 military in 2019 . (others, 2019)

It should be mentioned that the American military existence on his return to Iraq was at the request of the government of Noori al-Maliki in 2014 in order to help in the fight against ISIS, and the establishment of fixed bases in Iraq was with the approval of the government of Haidar al-Abadi, who took over from the end of 2014 to 2018, including US military bases In the Kurdistan region, the resigned government of Adel Abdul Mahdi came in the existence of US forces in Iraq. (Hassoun, 2019)

## **Section 2 : US military bases in Iraq :**

The US forces have been stationed in Iraq since 2014 in several military bases in Iraq, the most important of which are:

1. Ein Al-Asaad base , or “Al-Asaad base” located in Al-Anbar governorate about 100 miles west of the capital Baghdad, and the base was built for the Iraqi army in the desert in the era of the eighties, and after the American occupation of Iraq in 2003 made the American forces one of its largest military bases It was handed over to the Iraqi forces upon their withdrawal in 2011, and after the return of the US forces to Iraq in 2014, the base was secured and rebuilt again, and reports indicate that it includes nearly 1,500 members of the US and coalition forces. (BBC News Arabic, 2010) It includes missile batteries, artillery and infantry battalions, and it is the base on which the Donald Trump administration decided to spend \$ 3 billion to develop and expand it in the future to be a suitable military base and a potential alternative to other US bases in the countries of the region. (Fawzi & Keshta, 2019) , This base was visited by all American presidents after the American occupation of Iraq, when former US President George W. Bush visited in 2007, and former US President Barack Obama visited in 2009, and current US President Donald Trump visited in December 2018, just as Vice President Mike Pence visited in November. Year 2019 . (Sputnik Arabic, 2020)

2. Balad Air Base, which is one of the largest military air bases in Iraq and is located in the city of Balad in Salah al-Din Governorate, north of Baghdad. (The Iraq House Center for Strategic Studies, 2018).

3. Victory base "Al-Nasr", this base is located northwest of Baghdad at Baghdad International Airport, and it is a military fortress equipped with various driving methods, it contains runways, aircraft squadrons and places of residence and is more like a military city. (Saqr Center for Strategic Studies, 2010) For the US forces, the Victory Base is more like a military arm in Iraq and uses it for command, control, control, intelligence, and investigations. (Fayyad, 2019).

4. Base K1, located in the province of Kirkuk and includes American forces tasked with training and rehabilitation.

5. The Alton Kobry base, taken by the US forces as its military base, and it is also located in Kirkuk governorate, about 50 kilometers away from the city of Erbil, and is distinguished by an important strategic location and forms a link between central and northern Iraq, just as the road between Kirkuk and Erbil is mediated.

6. Al-Qayyarah Air base, and US forces were stationed in it during the battles against ISIS, and it is located in Nineveh Governorate, about 58 km away from the city of Mosul, and it has become one of the largest strategic military bases in Iraq, as it includes an important military airport.

7. Al-Taji Air base, a US military base within one of the largest military bases in Iraq, located north of the capital, Baghdad, and the mission of the US forces there is to train Iraqi forces.

8. American bases in Kurdistan, and there are 3 military bases in Iraqi Kurdistan in which American forces are present: a silk base in Arbil, an American base near Sinjar, and an American base in the city of Halabja in Sulaimaniya, which is the American base that raises concern in Iran as it was considered as The American hand that can extend to the Iranian depth. (Al-Amin, 2020)

But despite the US forces stationed in these bases and took care of them, but these forces carried out a redeployment process in Iraq and a reduction in their numbers witnessed last March and carried out the evacuation of a number of these bases and handed them over to the Iraqi forces, and US officials stated that this redeployment process came on The background of the spread of the Corona epidemic in Iraq and the world, and the redeployment in the smallest number of bases is in order to secure its protection from any future attacks that it may be exposed to by allies of Iran. Indeed, the first base, the Al-Qaim military base, was handed over to the Iraqi forces on March 19, on the Iraqi-Syrian border established by the US forces in 2018, followed by the delivery of the K1 base in Kirkuk on March 26, and the Qayyarah military base on March 29 itself and the presidential palaces in The city of Mosul, also in early April. (Al-Hamid, 2020)

The US forces sought to limit their existence to the smallest number of the largest military bases in Iraq, and the focus was more broadly focused on the bases of "Ein Al-Asad" in western Iraq and "Harir" in the north, and these two bases were recently equipped with the Patriot missile defense system, which indicates To the American endeavor to fortify and protect these bases on the one hand, and its expectation that their forces will be subjected to shelling with ballistic missiles or internal attacks on the other hand. (Gulf Online, 2020)

### **Section 3 : Tasks and Goals :**

The American military existence in Iraq occupies a great strategic importance to the United States of America that comes from the strategic importance of Iraq on the one hand and the importance of the Middle East region in the American global strategy on the other hand, this importance necessitates

that the United States of America have a direct military existence in Iraq and the region, on which it falls. Many of the tasks and goals required by the process of protecting and promoting US interests in Iraq and the Middle East, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The task of combating terrorism and in particular confronting ISIS is the first task and the main justification for the US military existence in Iraq and it was at the request of the Iraqi government to help curb ISIS, which seized several provinces, including Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Anbar and parts of Diyala, Kirkuk and Baghdad in June. The US forces returned to Iraq as part of the "international coalition to combat terrorism" forces along with many other countries that reached 66 countries in 2016. The United States led this coalition and the US State Department implemented its comprehensive strategy aimed at weakening and destroying the organization once and for all. The campaign was called "Operation Inherent Resolve", and the operation is led by an American officer with the rank of Lieutenant General and carried out by a unified joint task force (CJTF-OIR) under the supervision of the US Central Command, and the mission of these forces is to strike ISIS strongholds and targets in Iraqi and Syrian territories and support the Iraqi forces in their battles against ISIS to regain control of the lands and areas it seized. (Konopal, 2017)

Although ISIS was declared militarily defeated and its last strongholds were liberated in Iraq, the organization still possesses some pockets and has carried out numerous terrorist operations, which means that the need for the existence of American forces to confront this organization and destroy its hideouts continues, and American forces are also working to support Iraqi forces in securing the borders and the implementation of joint operations and participation in intelligence operations and information that contribute to the fight against terrorism and the prosecution of ISIS elements or work to prevent the organization from re-emerging again, in order to eliminate it. (Knights, The Future of the Iraqi Armed Forces, 2016) Especially since there is information indicating that ISIS is planning to carry out dozens of terrorist operations in Iraq, and the United Nations has estimated that the organization still possesses reserves of up to 300 million dollars to support its terrorist operations, and from here the American forces will continue their mission and the ministers who participated in the coalition meeting pledged the international community to fight ISIS on November 14, 2019 continues to support Iraq in order to eliminate the organization, and in order to fulfill this pledge, the Americans believe that they must remain in Iraq, otherwise they will risk repeating the mistakes of 2011 when

the early withdrawal of their forces led to the rise of ISIS in the first place in the first place. (Pollock, 2020)

2. Training and arming, the US forces in Iraq undertake several tasks in the field of supporting the security forces and the Iraqi army, including arming that includes aircraft and main weapons systems, equipment and maintenance work, providing intelligence information, and providing various other support such as training, exchanging experiences and providing advice in order to be Better Iraqi military operations. (Pfaff, 2020)

3. Supporting stability in Iraq, US officials and the staff of the US administration see the necessity of continuing the US military existence in Iraq in order to support and achieve stability in the various regions of Iraq, especially the areas that were controlled by ISIS (Sabri, 2019), as it has a specific specificity and must be dealt with Especially in order to remove the reasons that were behind the control of ISIS.

4. Protecting American interests, the United States of America aims, through its direct military existence in the Iraqi arena, for this existence to be an appropriate tool to protect American interests in Iraq, which is represented in protecting the US embassy, which is the largest embassy of a foreign country in the region, not just Iraq, and protecting economic interests in Iraq. And ensuring existence on permanent bases in a country that occupies an important strategic position in the Middle East region, which is Iraq. (Azzam, 2020)

5. Confronting Iranian influence in Iraq, although one of the tasks and objectives of the US military existence in Iraq is evident by monitoring Iran and trying to balance its influence in the Iraqi arena, but a shift witnessed by these goals is the use of force directly against Iranian targets in Iraq or against whom The United States considers them allies or proxies of Iran in Iraq, and they pose a threat to its interests and to the Americans present in Iraq, both military and civilian, and it is very clear the direct use of military force against Iran in Iraq The assassination of General Qassim Soleimani, commander of the "Quds Force" in (IRG) The Iranian Revolutionary Guard, upon his arrival at Baghdad International Airport in early January 2020. From the armed factions and groups in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen on the other side. The American forces and its air force in Iraq launched numerous air strikes on camps for the Iraqi "Hezbollah Brigades" and weapons storage places belonging to it, including targeting five facilities in Iraq and Syria on December 29, 2019, killing 15 of its members, including two of its leaders, which the Pentagon considered "defensive strikes." A minute "aims to" hinder the party's ability to launch future attacks

against forces of " Operation Inherent Resolve " (DW website, 2019). In March 2020, the US forces in Iraq launched strikes against Hezbollah Brigades sites in Iraq in response to a missile attack targeting the Taji camp, killing two American and British soldiers and wounding others. The Pentagon confirmed that the strikes affected facilities that include weapons stores that are used to target The US and coalition forces, and that these strikes "are the appropriate and direct response to the threat posed by the Iranian-backed militias," and the targeted sites were in Najaf and others in southern Baghdad. (BBC News Arabic, 2020)

And that the goals and tasks for which the US forces came were characterized by change and expansion, and were not limited to the task of confronting terrorism and fighting ISIS only or supporting the Iraqi forces, but rather it adopted another goals, perhaps the most important of which is confronting Iranian influence in Iraq, especially in light of the direction of the Donald Trump administration.

#### **Section 4 : The challenges of the US military existence in Iraq:**

The existence of the US forces in Iraq with regard to the Iraqi situation faces challenges in the political and security fields, and although these challenges may affect the status of the US military existence, they may not be a basic reason for ending its existence in Iraq according to the directions of the US administration aiming for a long-term existence in Iraq. The challenges and obstacles facing the existence of US forces in Iraq can be summarized as follows:

1. Political challenges, represented by the rejection of the existence of the US military existence in Iraq and it has taken three levels, all of which are related to the Iranian influence on political life in Iraq through which Iran is working to find pressure papers on the United States of America to bargain in the field of its nuclear file and the US sanctions imposed on it, Often the voices rejecting the US existence in Iraq are affected by the level of the US-Iranian conflict, up and down, and perhaps these three levels of rejection are:

- The official level, and this official rejection of the US forces in Iraq came explicitly and took the form of an official procedure, especially after the targeting operation that was carried out by the US forces and affected Qassim Soleimani on January 3, 2020. Parliament in order to pass the necessary and urgent legislation to end the existence of foreign forces on Iraqi lands, and the Iraqi government considered that the country is facing two options: the first is to work to end the foreign military existence in Iraq urgently, and the second is to return to a previous draft resolution stipulating restrictions The tasks of the foreign forces in Iraq are to train and assist the Iraqi forces in the war against

ISIS, so the first option was that which Adel Abdul Mahdi adopted, and the Iraqi Council of Representatives responded to the government's request and issued a decision on January 5, 2020 demanding the government to cancel the aid request submitted to the international coalition in 2016. To end the military operations to liberate Iraqi cities from ISIS control and work to end the foreign military existence on Iraqi lands, and to submit an official complaint to The Security Council against the United States of America for violating the sovereignty of Iraq (TRT Arabic, 2020). This decision sparked widespread controversy in Iraqi political circles because it was passed by Shiite representatives in the absence of representatives of Sunni and Kurdish political blocs and a number of representatives of other Shiite blocs that want a permanent American military existence in Iraq to balance Iranian influence.

- The Iraqi Prime Minister took another step when he submitted a request during his call with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on January 9, 2020 in line with the Iraqi parliament's decision to withdraw troops from Iraq. Iraq, "and the response of the US State Department, according to her spokeswoman, Morgan Ortagus," that any American delegation will not discuss the withdrawal of US forces because their existence in Iraq is appropriate, "while Trump's statement came through his interview with Fox News that:" If the race wants to leave the forces We will tell him you have to pay the money we paid, "referring to the money spent on building military bases in Iraq, while Pompeo held talks with his Canadian counterpart Francois Philippe Champaign about Iran and the opportunity to expand NATO's force in Iraq and share the burden appropriately. (Heavey, 2020)

- The level of political forces, the Iraqi political forces were divided into two directions in their stance towards the US military existence in Iraq, especially during the last two years when the controversy became clearer regarding the matter. The first trend aimed at removing these forces and ending their existence from the Iraqi arena is represented by a number of relevant political forces. The close connection with Iran, including the Badr Organization, the Supreme Islamic Council, League of the Righteous People, the Sadrist movement, and others. As for the second trend that wants the American forces to remain in Iraq, it is represented by a number of Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish political forces in general. The first trend goes that the survival of the American forces constitutes a violation of Iraqi sovereignty and must be ended. This development came after the expansion of the tasks of the American forces from training Iraqi forces to monitoring Iranian activities in Iraq, and the situation became more severe after the United States of America classified both the "Nujaba Movement"

and " The Iranian Revolutionary Guard "is on the lists of terrorist organizations, while the second trend believes that the survival of the US forces in Iraq is a necessity to preserve stability and confront Iranian influence. (Ahmed, 2019) Despite the inability of the political forces that reject the American existence to end this existence, their position constitutes a political challenge to this existence in the Iraqi arena and cannot be ignored by the United States of America due to the role and influence of these forces in the political process and the Iraqi political decision.:

- The popular level, protests have been characterized by a popular character, although their motive is the political forces, demanding the departure of US forces from Iraq, and the protesters tried to storm the US embassy last January, and others like it sold the Sadrist movement on January 24 and raised slogans against the US military existence. And demanded to end his existence in Iraq. (Al-Yaqoubi, 2020)

2. Security challenges, the American bases and forces have been subjected to many threats and attacks, and perhaps the source of these threats is Iran, whether it was implemented directly or through its allies from the factions and armed groups in Iraq, and among the most prominent attacks on the US forces in Iraq are:

- An IED attack on US forces on October 1, 2017, in which an American soldier was killed and another was wounded. Desiring to get the US forces out of Iraq.

- A missile attack on "Ain Al-Asad base" on February 2, 2019, with three Katyusha rockets, which was thwarted by Iraqi forces based on US intelligence information.

- A missile attack on the "Qayyarah Air Force base" on February 12, 2019, when the base was attacked by three 107 mm rockets, and the US forces stated at the time that they had arrested individuals belonging to an Iranian-backed militia without announcing its name.

- An attack on the Taji camp on May 1, 2019, with two 107-caliber missiles, in which American forces are stationed to train Iraqi forces. The US forces say that members of the "Asaib Ahl al-Haq" movement were the ones that carried out the attack. (Knights, Responding to Iranian Harassment of US Facilities in Iraq, 2019)

- The American forces were attacked by Katyusha rockets in the presidential palaces in Mosul on June 19, 2019.

- The "Balad Air Force Base" was attacked with a number of mortar shells on July 15, 2019, and then it was attacked again with Katyusha rockets on December 5, 2019.
- The "Qayyarah Air Base" south of Mosul was attacked by a number of Katyusha rockets on November 8, 2019 (al-Din, 2019). Then it was bombed again when 5 shells fell on it on January 31, 2020, and the United States of America accused the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades of these attacks. (thenewkhalij, 2020)
- Attacks on "K1 base" in Kirkuk, as the base was targeted with an attack with 30 rockets on December 27, 2019, and the second missile attack on the base was on February 13, 2020, and because of these attacks, the US forces responded with similar attacks on the headquarters and warehouses of the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades, which killed 25 fighters in one attack. (thenewkhalij, 2020)

All that has been mentioned is missile attacks targeting US forces inside Iraq from parties considered by the United States of America to be Iran's armed proxies in Iraq. As for the threat that Iran carried out directly, it was manifested in the missile attack on the bases of "Ein Al-Asaad" in Anbar and "Harir" in Erbil. On January 8, 2020, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard targeted the two bases with ten medium-range ballistic missiles, and the attack came in the midst of the US-Iranian escalation in the Iraqi arena, which culminated in the US forces targeting the commander of the Iranian "Quds Corps" in Baghdad on January 3, 2020. The strike is revenge for the killing of Soleimani. (Rasanah, 2020)

## **Conclusion**

We see that the issue of the direct US military existence in Iraq has passed through two stages: The first began when the US forces occupied Iraq and toppled the existing regime on April 9, 2003, and continued until the end of 2011 when the last remaining forces withdrew based on the agreement to withdraw US forces from Iraq. As for the second stage, it began with ISIS seizing large areas of Iraq since June 10, 2014, and the Iraqi government requested the assistance of the American forces in the war on terror.

However, the tasks and objectives of the US military existence have evolved over time, especially under the Donald Trump administration, whose administration has worked to develop some US bases in Iraq, especially Ein Al-Asaad, and has become one of the tasks and objectives of the US forces to monitor Iran's activities in Iraq and work to counter Iranian influence in The Iraqi arena, so that Iraq has become an arena for settling scores between the United States of

America and Iran, and it is not ruled out that Iraq is a starting point for any war between the two parties.

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