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THE USE OF THE ARMED FORCES AS A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Barry M. Blechman

and

Stephen S. Kaplan

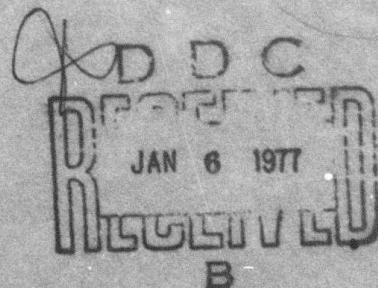
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Advanced Research Projects Agency
ARPA Order No. 2820, Amendment No. 2

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ARPA Order Number

2820, Amend. #2/9-4-74/Program
Code 5W10

Contract Number

N00014-75-C-0140

Contractor

The Brookings Institution
1775 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Effective Date of Contract

1 August 1976

Expiration Date of Contract

31 December 1976

Principal Investigators

Barry M. Blechman
Stephen S. Kaplan
(202) 797-6000

Scientific Officer

Dr. John A. Nagay

ACCESSION for	
NTIS	White Section ☒
DOC	Bull Section ☐
UNANNOUNCED	☐
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DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY CODES	
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On November 11, 1944 the Turkish Ambassador to the United States, Mehmet Munir Ertegün, died in Washington; not a very important event at a time when Allied forces were sweeping across France and east Europe toward Germany, and Berlin and Tokyo were approaching Götterdämmerung. Sixteen months later, however, the Ambassador's remains were the focus of world attention as the curtain went up on a classic act in the use of armed forces as a political instrument. On March 6, 1946, the U.S. Department of State announced that the late Ambassador Ertegün's remains would be sent home to Turkey aboard the U.S.S. Missouri, visibly the most powerful surface combatant in the United States Navy and the ship on board which General Douglas MacArthur had recently accepted Japan's surrender.

Between the Ambassador's death and this announcement, not only had World War II ended, the Cold War--yet untitled--had begun. In addition to conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union over Poland, Germany, Iran, and other areas, the Soviet Union had demanded the concession of two Turkish provinces in the east, and, in the west, a base in the area of the Dardanelles.

On March 22, the Missouri began a slow journey from New York harbor to Turkey. At Gibraltar the British Governor had a wreath placed on board. Accompanied by the destroyer Power, the great battleship was met on April 3rd in the eastern Mediterranean by the light cruiser Providence. Finally, on the morning of April 5th, the Missouri and her escorts anchored in the harbor at Istanbul.

The meaning of this event was missed by no one; Washington had not so subtly reminded the Soviet Union and others that the United States was a great military

power, and that it could project this power abroad, even to shores far distant. Whether the visit of the Missouri, or it together with other U.S. actions that followed deterred the Soviet Union from implementing any further planned or potential hostile acts toward Turkey will probably never be known. What is clear, is that no forceful Soviet actions followed the visit. Moreover, as a symbol of American support for Turkey vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, the visit of the Missouri was well received and deeply appreciated by the Government of Turkey, the Turkish press and, as near as anyone could tell, by the Turkish citizenry at large.

This voyage by the Missouri to Turkey represents but one of many discrete uses of the U.S. armed forces as a political instrument since the Second World War. During the past three decades the United States has utilized its armed forces often, and in a wide variety of ways. Most of these uses have had an international political dimension; that is, they may have influenced the perceptions and behavior of political leaders in foreign countries to some degree. This study is concerned with only some of these uses of the armed forces: those instances in which military units were used in a discrete way to achieve specific objectives in a particular situation.

Clearly, the use of the armed forces as an instrument for supporting American foreign policy is a subject of great interest. It is also one of conjecture. Yet, to date, there has been little research devoted to the topic. The empirical record itself is sparse: this study is the first to present a systematic compilation of where, when, and how the United States has used its armed forces for political objectives. Moreover, there have been virtually no rigorous evaluations of the utility of the armed forces in these roles. And, still fewer

studies have aimed at advising decisionmakers as to when such operations are likely to succeed; even fewer at how to maximize the effectiveness of the armed forces in these political roles. These are the aims of this study.

The Historical Record

According to the terms of the definition used in this examination, there were 215 incidents in which the United States utilized its armed forces for political objectives between January 1, 1946 and October 31, 1975--an arbitrary cut-off date that was necessarily imposed on the research.

Over time, the distribution of the 215 incidents can be categorized into four periods: 1946-48, 1949-55, 1956-65, and 1966-75. For the three years immediately following the Second World War, the annual average number of incidents ran slightly above the average for the entire 30 year period. Between 1949 and 1955, the United States used its armed forces less frequently for political purposes. Beginning again in 1956, however, the use of the armed forces for political objectives became more common and the number of incidents per year increased gradually, peaking in 1964. Indeed, the period 1956-65 stands apart as a time of great American activism. This activist period ended abruptly, in 1966, and the frequency of incidents has remained relatively low ever since.

The number of incidents which occurred each year appears related to several factors, including: the current or recent involvement of the United States in a shooting war (i.e., Korea and Vietnam), the number of opportunities presented by the international system, the nation's sense of confidence, presidential popularity, and the relationship between U.S. and USSR strategic nuclear forces. In a statistical analysis, the first three of these factors seemed to "explain"

U.S. involvement in three-fifths of the incidents.

The regional focus of U.S. political uses of the armed forces also has varied widely over time. Over the full period, the incidents were distributed relatively evenly, except for the Southern Hemisphere, in which relatively few incidents took place. Europe, the Middle East, Southeast and East Asia, and the Caribbean each accounted for one-fifth to one-fourth of the total number of incidents.

Incidents also varied widely in terms of the size and composition of the American military forces which became involved. They ranged from a visit to a foreign port by a single warship to the deployment of major ground, air, and naval units against a backdrop including the mobilization of reserves and the placing on alert of strategic nuclear forces. Still, most incidents were relatively minor affairs, in which neither the stakes involved (at least for the United States), the amount of force employed, nor the activity of U.S. forces ever attained significant proportions.

Throughout the post-war period, the United States has turned most often to the Navy when it has desired to employ components of the armed forces in support of political objectives. Naval units participated in more than four out of every five incidents. Land-based forces were used in much fewer incidents, and rarely without the simultaneous participation of naval units. Land-based air units participated in roughly one-half of the total number of incidents. Ground combat units took part in only about one-fifth of the total. Strategic nuclear force units were used alone or together with conventional force units in one-tenth of the incidents.

A five-level scale was constructed which, based on the historical data, ranked "military level of effort." The two greatest levels of force, used in one-seventh (33) of the incidents, were taken to include actions in which strategic nuclear force units were used together with at least one "major" conventional force component, or two or three "major" conventional force components were used apart from strategic nuclear force units. A major conventional force component was defined as two or more aircraft carrier task groups, or a ground force larger than one battalion, or one or more land-based combat air wings.

The distribution of these 33 significant incidents over time is similar to that of the overall number of incidents. There is a strong relationship, however, between U.S. military level of effort and Soviet or Chinese participation: the United States used major force components proportionally more often when either the USSR or Chinese military forces actually were, or threatened to become involved in the incidents.

Although U.S. armed forces have been used frequently for political objectives over the past thirty years, only relatively infrequently have they had to do anything in a specific operational sense. Typically, the armed forces--and particularly naval forces--have provided a U.S. presence on (or near) the scene of the incident, presumably prepared to take action; but the situations precipitating the military activity have generally run their course before the armed forces were required to take more specific action. When specific operations were carried out, they most often were of a passive character (e.g., visits, patrols). More manifestly military actions--e.g., the use of firepower or the establishment of a blockade--took place very infrequently.

The Question of Utility

The heart of the study is the question of effectiveness, or utility. When do discrete uses of the armed forces help to satisfy U.S. foreign policy objectives with regard to particular situations abroad? Does the size, type, or activities of the forces involved matter? Can utility be enhanced by diplomacy or the use of other levers of policy in conjunction with the military operations? Are particular types of objectives more likely to be satisfied than others? Answers to these questions, and similar ones, were sought through three distinct types of analyses.

First, a sample of incidents was selected for a systematic and rigorous comparative analysis of outcomes. Fifteen percent of the full set of incidents (33 incidents) were chosen so as to create a structured sample. By design, the characteristics of this structured sample closely paralleled those of the full set of incidents.

Second, more detailed assessments were made of the specific mechanisms through which military operations affected the perceptions and decisions of foreign policymakers in thirteen case studies. Six specialists addressed a lengthy set of questions concerning the United States' use of the armed forces in each of two or three incidents, as follows:

<u>Investigator</u>	<u>Incidents</u>
David K. Hall	Laotian Civil War (1962) Indo-Pakistani War (1971)
William B. Quandt	Lebanese Civil War (1958) Jordanian Civil War (1970)
Jerome N. Slater	Dominican Intervention (1961) Dominican Intervention (1965)

InvestigatorIncidents

Robert M. Slusser

Berlin Crisis (1958-59)
Berlin Crisis (1961)

Philip Windsor

Security of Yugoslavia (1951)
Invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968)

Robert Simmons

Seizure of the Pueblo (1968)
Shoot-down of the EC-121 (1969)
Seizure of the Mayaguez (1975)

Further insight into the U.S. use of the armed forces for political objectives was sought by examining comparable activity undertaken by the Soviet Union.

Utility: Conclusions

Discrete uses of the armed forces are often an effective way of achieving near term foreign policy objectives. When the United States engaged in these political-military activities, the outcomes of the situations at which the activity was directed were most often favorable from the perspective of U.S. decisionmakers--at least in the short term. In an overwhelming proportion of the incidents, however, this "success rate"--the relative number of outcomes which were positive from the standpoint of U.S. decisionmakers--eroded sharply over time.

Thus, it would seem that discrete uses of military forces for political objectives serve mainly to delay unwanted developments abroad. What political-military operations seem to do, is provide a respite; i.e., a means of postponing adverse developments so that there is enough time to formulate and implement new policies which may be sustainable over the longer term. Or, in those

cases when new policies which are likely to be successful over the long term cannot be formulated, the political use of armed forces can serve to lessen the consequences of detrimental events. This is not to gainsay the value of "buying time," of keeping a situation open and flexible enough to prevent the occurrence of a detrimental fait accompli. Still, it should be recognized that these military operations cannot substitute for more fundamental policy and actions--for diplomacy, for close economic and cultural relations, and for an affinity of mutual interests and perceptions--which can form the basis either for sound and successful alliances or for stable adversative relations.

Four groups of factors seem to influence the relative success or failure of political uses of the armed forces: the nature of the United States' objectives, the context of the incident, activity by the Soviet Union, and the type and activity of the U.S. military forces which became involved.

U.S. Objectives

The nature of U.S. objectives seems to be an important determinant of whether or not a political use of force is successful. The armed forces were most often used successfully as political instruments when the objective of U.S. policymakers was to maintain the authority of a certain regime abroad. Indeed, maintenance of regime authority was the one type of objective which was likely to be sustained over the longer term. The armed forces were least often successful when the objective related to the use of force by a foreign actor. Between these two was the success rate pertaining to objectives which may be categorized as "the provision of support to third parties." U.S. armed forces sometimes were, but often were not successful when they aimed to dissuade a third party from supporting another international actor, or to persuade a

third party to provide such support.

Perhaps more significant, however, is the mode in which the armed forces were used as a political instrument. It is evident that discrete uses of the armed forces for political purposes are most often successful when the U.S. objective is to reinforce, rather than to modify, the behavior of a target state. Whether a military demonstration was made in order to coerce a hostile actor to change its behavior, or to encourage a friendly actor to change its behavior, the result was similar; these actions were not successful very often. On the other hand, when U.S. armed forces were used to coerce a hostile target state so that it would continue to do something (e.g., stay at peace), or to encourage a friendly state to continue doing something (e.g., continue resisting an adversary), these military demonstrations were successful relatively more often.

It was also observed that these military demonstrations were most successful when U.S. objectives were complementary, at least loosely, with prior U.S. policies. It seems evident that the purposes of demonstrative uses of force must fit within a fundamental framework of expectations conceived by decision-makers both in this country and abroad, if the military activity is to attain its desired end. This is made clear, for example, by the fact that although prior diplomatic activity was closely associated with positive outcomes of the 33 sample incidents examined, diplomatic activity during the course of the incidents themselves did not seem to have been particularly important for positive results.

Soviet Activity

A second group of factors which seem to have influenced the relative effectiveness of the armed forces as a political instrument pertained to the Soviet Union--the character of U.S.-Soviet relations at the time and the specific role played by the Soviet Union in the incidents.

One conclusion that runs counter to presently prevailing views concerns the effect of the U.S.-Soviet strategic nuclear balance on the relative fortunes of the superpowers. We did not find, as is often maintained, that the United States became less successful in the use of armed forces for political objectives as the Soviet Union closed the U.S. lead in strategic nuclear weapons. Soviet political and/or military involvement in an incident, on the other hand, was of great significance. Outcomes tended to be less favorable from the U.S. perspective when the Soviet Union was involved in an incident. Outcomes were particularly less favorable when the Soviet Union threatened to, or actually employed its own armed forces in the incident. Interestingly, this finding pertained more to the short term (6 month) success rate than to the longer term outcomes.

The pernicious effect of Soviet involvement was eroded somewhat during periods of détente. The outcomes of incidents in which the Soviet Union was involved tended to be more favorable from the U.S. point of view when overall U.S.-Soviet relations were characterized by greater co-operation. And, as in the previous case, this finding was even stronger when just those incidents in which the Soviet Union participated were considered, and even stronger still when just those incidents in which Soviet military forces were involved were considered.

Nature of the Situation

Outcomes also tended to be favorable more frequently when demonstrative uses of force were directed at intra-national situations, as contrasted to international situations. We do not have overwhelming confidence in this finding, however, because two other factors which also are closely associated with favorable outcomes are correlated with intra-national situations: Intra-national situations tended to be easier to deal with; they required lesser amounts of force, and the U.S. objective in these situations was more often one of reinforcement rather than modification.

In international situations, success was most frequent in those incidents in which the United States was involved from the very onset of a conflict. This conclusion fits nicely with our previous statement concerning the need for the U.S. objective and the specific use of force to complement a prior framework of relationships characterizing the relevant international environment. In international situations in which the U.S. was intervening, so-to-speak, in a situation which did not concern it directly (at least not initially), there was likely to be some question in the minds of the other actors as to whether U.S. threats or promises were credible ones.

Size, Activity, and Type of Military Forces Involved in the Incident

Here, we have at least one clear and one ambiguous finding.

It is evident that the firmer the commitment implied by the military operation itself, the more likely that the outcome of the situation would be positive. Thus, for example, forces actually emplaced on foreign soil tended to be more frequently associated with positive outcomes than were naval forces.

Naval forces, after all, could be withdrawn just as easily as they could be moved toward the disturbed area. The movement of land-based forces, on the other hand, involves both real economic costs and a certain psychological commitment which is difficult to reverse, at least in the short term.

Positive outcomes were particularly frequent when land-based combat aircraft were involved in an incident. This would suggest, particularly in view of the much greater mobility of contemporary land-based tactical air units, that the Air Force might be used more frequently when political-military operations of this sort are contemplated, than has been the case historically. It may be noted that the Soviet Union has utilized land-based Air Force units in limited ways for political objectives on relatively frequent occasions. In view of our findings, the United States might do well to investigate ways to emulate this greater reliance on land-based units. There are other ways of enhancing the effectiveness of the armed forces as well. Outcomes were more often favorable when the armed forces involved actually did something, rather than merely emphasized their potential capability to intervene by establishing a presence near the scene. The involvement of the military unit in a specific operation, such as the actual exercise of firepower or by carrying out such operations as surveillance or mine-clearing, seems to have indicated a more serious intent on the United States' part.

There is one other possible way of indicating the seriousness of the U.S. intent. We found that success was more often associated with larger force components when the forces involved in the situation also included elements of the U.S. strategic nuclear forces. Clearly, foreign decisionmakers perceived the use of strategic nuclear forces--whether they were or were not accompanied

with specific threats to use nuclear weapons--as an important signal that the United States perceived the situation in a most serious way. Thus, in a sense, the employment of nuclear-associated forces--like SAC aircraft or Sixth Fleet carriers when they were central to U.S. plans for nuclear war--served the same purpose as did the involvement of military units in a specific activity, or the use of ground forces as compared to naval forces: they bolstered U.S. credibility. The risks of such a policy, however, should be obvious.

The more ambiguous finding pertains to the consequences of variations in the size of the armed forces units involved in the incidents. We did not find greater success to be associated with the use of larger elements of the armed forces. Indeed, we found the opposite; the outcomes of incidents in which larger elements of force were involved were less often positive. We interpret this finding to mean that U.S. decisionmakers were able to estimate the degree of difficulty posed by a situation, and thus to judge the relative size of the force that would be commensurate with that degree of difficulty. In short, we would guess that larger forces generally took part in those situations in which the attainment of U.S. objectives seemed most difficult, or to imply the greatest risks. When smaller components of force were used, then, in most cases, the attainment of the U.S. objectives was not considered too difficult. Hence, it is not surprising that the use of smaller forces was associated with a greater likelihood of success: the larger forces had to deal with the tougher problems. What this indicates, however, is one of two things.

One possibility, is that U.S. decisionmakers frequently underestimated the amount of force required and, therefore, did not increase the amount of force involved sufficiently to bring about favorable outcomes. This seems to

us to be unlikely. On the other hand, perhaps what this finding indicates is that increased force size alone simply cannot compensate for the increased difficulty of attaining an objective. Thus, what is more important than the involvement of larger forces, if it is expected that the U.S. objective will be difficult to achieve, is one of the several signs just mentioned which would indicate the seriousness of the U.S. intent; a sign such as the engagement of the military units in some specific activity, or the emplacement of forces on the ground in the region of concern.

A Last Word

By and large, the demonstrative and discrete use of the armed forces for political objectives should not be an option which decisionmakers turn to frequently, nor quickly, to secure political objectives abroad, except under very special circumstances. We have found that over the longer term these uses of the armed forces were not an effective foreign policy instrument. Decisionmakers should not expect such uses of the armed forces to be able to serve as viable substitutes for broader and more fundamental policies; policies tailored to the realities of politics abroad, and incorporating diplomacy and the many other potential instruments available to U.S. foreign policy.

We have found, however, that in particular circumstances, demonstrative uses of the armed forces can sometimes be an effective way--at least in the short term--of securing U.S. objectives and preventing foreign situations inimical to U.S. interests from worsening more rapidly than more fundamental policies can be formulated. Thus, at times, and although decisionmakers should view these options with some caution, the demonstrative use of the armed forces

for political objectives is a useful step to shore up a situation sufficiently so that more extreme adverse consequences can be avoided, so that domestic and international pressures for more forceful and perhaps counter-productive actions can be avoided, and so that time can be gained for sounder policies that can deal adequately with the realities of the situation to be formulated and implemented.

To reach this conclusion about the effectiveness of the armed forces as a political instrument is not to reach any judgment about the wisdom of using the armed forces for these purposes. That question is a more difficult one, one which can only be answered in the context of the specific choices--and the various costs and benefits associated with each choice--facing decision-makers at the time.

Nonetheless, over the past 30 years, six Presidents (or their designated foreign policy managers) have decided that a political use of the armed forces was the wisest choice on more than 200 occasions. Although, on the average, there have been fewer such occasions in recent years than there were before the United States became involved in the War in Southeast Asia, the number of times each year which the armed forces are required to serve a political purpose abroad is not trivial.

In view of this, it makes sense to consider possible political uses of the armed forces more centrally in decisions on the structure of U.S. forces, and more to the point, in decisions on operational and deployment patterns of U.S. forces. Of course, these decisions must be based on many other factors as well; many of which--particularly those requirements which flow from plans for war-fighting--should be accorded higher priority. Still, if U.S. military

forces are acquired and operated solely to meet the needs of the "worst case"-- the big war, they are likely to be inappropriately configured for the needs of the many cases which occur more frequently. Use as a political instrument is an important function of the armed forces. These operations should receive commensurate attention in force planning and deployment decisions.

UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE (When Data Entered)

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle)		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED
(6) The Use of Armed Forces as a Political Instrument, <i>Executive Summary.</i>		(9) Final Technical Report, Nov. 1974 -Dec 1975 1976
7. AUTHOR(s)		8. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
(10) Barry M. Blechman Stephen S. Kaplan		(31)
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS		10. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
The Brookings Institution 1775 Massachusetts Ave., N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036		(15) N00014-75-C-0140 ARPA Order-2820
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS		12. REPORT DATE
Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency 1400 Wilson Blvd. Arlington, Virginia 22209		(11) 31 December 1976
13. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		14. NUMBER OF PAGES
Office of Naval Research Department of the Navy 800 North Quincy Street Arlington, Virginia 22217		674
15. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)		16. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report)
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited		UNCLASSIFIED
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		18. DECLASSIFICATION DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
19. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
20. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)		
armed forces as a political instrument, conflict, confrontation, crisis history, crisis management, decisionmaking, effectiveness of force, empirical analysis, force structure, foreign policy, foreign policy signals, international politics, political-military affairs, use of force		
21. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)		
During the past three decades the United States has utilized its armed forces often, and in a wide variety of ways. Most of these uses have had an international political dimension; that is, they may have influenced the perceptions and behavior of political leaders in foreign countries to some degree. This study, however, is concerned with only those instances in which military units were used in a discrete way to achieve specific objectives in a particular situation. There were 215 such instances between 1945 and 1975.		

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Clearly, the use of the armed forces as an instrument for supporting American foreign policy is a subject of great interest. It is also one of conjecture. Yet, to date, there has been little research devoted to the topic. The empirical record itself is sparse: this study is the first to present a systematic compilation of where, when, and how the United States has used its armed forces for political objectives. Moreover, there have been virtually no rigorous evaluations of the utility of the armed forces in these roles. And, still fewer studies have aimed at advising decision-makers as to when such operations are likely to succeed; even fewer at how to maximize the effectiveness of the armed forces in these political roles. These are the aims of this study.

The study concludes that the demonstrative and discrete use of the armed forces for political objectives should not be an option which decision-makers turn to frequently, nor quickly, to secure political objectives abroad, except under very special circumstances. We have found that over the longer term these uses of the armed forces were not an effective foreign policy instrument.

Decisionmakers should not expect such uses of the armed forces to be able to serve as viable substitutes for broader and more fundamental policies; policies tailored to the realities of politics abroad, and incorporating diplomacy and the many other potential instruments available to U.S. foreign policy.

We have found, however, that in particular circumstances, demonstrative uses of the armed forces can sometimes be an effective way--at least in the short term--of securing U.S. objectives and preventing foreign situations inimical to U.S. interests from worsening more rapidly than more fundamental policies can be formulated. Thus, at times, and although decisionmakers should view these options with some caution, the demonstrative use of the armed forces for political objectives is a useful step to shore up a situation sufficiently so that more extreme adverse consequences can be avoided, so that domestic and international pressures for more forceful and perhaps counter-productive actions can be avoided, and so that time can be gained for sounder policies that can deal adequately with the realities of the situation to be formulated and implemented.

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