

Evaluation of Certificate-Based Authentication in Mobile Ad Hoc Networks

Abstract

The certificate-based authentication is well studied in wired networks. However, adapting certificate-based authentication protocols to mobile ad hoc networks (MANETs) is a nontrivial task, mainly because, in a MANET, as opposed to conventional wired networks, there typically exists no fixed infrastructure or centralized management. For example, a conventional certificate-based authentication system relies on a fixed trusted Certificate Authority (CA), which is responsible for the creation, distribution, renewing, and revocation of certificates. In a MANET, due to issues such as node mobility, limited wireless medium, and frequent link failures, it is typically not feasible to include such a fixed centralized CA in the network. Various approaches have been proposed to tackle the unique challenge of adapting certificate-based methods for distributed authentication in mobile ad hoc networks. Our contribution in this paper is threefold: we first analyze the requirements of a secure distributed authentication system for MANETs, and then survey some of the existing certificate-based authentication mechanisms, by analyzing their features, including pros and cons, in the context of distributed authentication. Finally, a series of scenario-based simulation experiments and metrics are proposed to evaluate these features.

Keywords: certificates, authentication, ad hoc networks, evaluation, simulation

1. Introduction

Since 1998, Mobile Ad Hoc Networks (MANETs) have received drastically increasing interest in the research community, partly owing to the potential applicability of MANETs to myriad applications, such as disaster recovery, battlefield operations, data sharing in conference halls, etc. The deployment of such networks, however, poses several challenging issues, due to the dynamic nature of the nodes, the arbitrary topology, the limited wireless range of nodes, and transmission errors. Since all the nodes in the network collaborate to forward the data, the wireless channel is prone to active and passive attacks by malicious nodes, such as Denial of Service (DoS),

eavesdropping, spoofing, etc. Thus implementing security is of prime importance in such networks.

The five components of a security mechanism are confidentiality, integrity, authenticity, availability and non-repudiability. Out of these, authenticity is the most important issue to be considered, since a breach of authenticity leads to a system-wide compromise. One of the widely-used authentication mechanisms in conventional wired networks is the public key management system using certificates.

One of the main issues to consider in a certificate-based scheme is the secure distribution of the public keys to all the nodes in the network. The *Public Key Infrastructure (PKI)* [12] defines methods to handle public key management using X.509 certificates. In a wired network we have a central certificate server which handles the creation, renewal and revocation of certificates on a centralized basis. This is not feasible in ad hoc networks, due to the absence of a fixed infrastructure and centralized management. Besides, due to the dynamic topology of the network, frequent link failures may occur, resulting in issues such as re-authentication and timely communication with the certificate server. Therefore, the server may become a bottleneck of the whole network.

To overcome these limitations and to reap full advantages of the certificate-based authentication mechanism, several public key management mechanisms have been proposed [1] [2] [3] [4] [6] [8]. In this paper we analyze some of them and discuss their pros and cons. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the requirements of a certificate-based authentication scheme for mobile ad hoc networks. Section 3 provides a survey and brief description of the employed mechanisms. We also discuss the pros and cons of each of them. In Section 4 we compare the schemes with respect to the requirements. In Section 5 we enumerate a few scenarios and metrics for the simulation study of these mechanisms, and in Section 6 we conclude the paper.

2. Requirements of an effective certificate-based authentication scheme for ad hoc networks

Five requirements have been identified for any certificate-based authentication scheme to be considered *secure* and *effective*, with respect to the authentication operations in a mobile ad hoc network.

R.1 *Distributed authentication:* In an ad hoc network, due to issues such as frequent link failures, node mobility, and limited wireless medium, it is typically not feasible to include a fixed centralized CA in the network. Further in networks requiring high security, such a server could become a single point of failure. For example, consider a battle field scenario, where the troops are spread over a large area. In such a case, it might not be feasible to have a central server. Consider an enemy attack on the server - this would bring down the whole network! Thus, one of the primary requirements of a certificate-based mechanism is to distribute the authentication amongst a set of nodes in the network.

R.2 *Resource awareness:* Since the nodes in an ad hoc network typically run on batteries with high power consumption and low memory capacity, the authentication protocols must be resource-aware. That means the time and space complexity of the underlying algorithms must be acceptably low. In this regard, symmetric-key-based cryptographic techniques are more suited, as compared to public key methods, since symmetric cryptography in general incur less resource consumption. However, the issue of distributing the symmetric keys prevents their practical deployment in ad hoc networks. This is a tradeoff that must be dealt with at the application level.

Since the certificate-based authentication uses public key mechanisms, which are resource-intensive, the protocol itself that is based on certificates must be efficient both in terms of memory and power.

R.3 *Efficient certificate management mechanism:* The distribution of public keys and management of certificates have been studied extensively in the case of wired networks [12]. However, in applying these methods to MANETs, managing the certificates (creation, revocation and renewal) is a challenging issue. We discuss this in Sections 3 and 4.

Most of the current mechanisms lack a robust certificate revocation scheme. Crepeau and Davis [5] propose a mechanism to maintain CRLs (certificate revocation lists) based upon profile and status tables. Their scheme handles well the

problem of malicious nodes revoking the certificates of trust worthy nodes. However, the assumption that each node knows the count of the number of nodes in the network at any instant might not be feasible to implement in a realistic scenario.

R.4. *Heterogeneous certification:* As in the case of wired networks, the certifying authorities might be heterogeneous even in ad hoc networks. This means that two or more nodes belonging to different “domains” may try to authenticate each other. In such a case, there must be some kind of trust relationship or hierarchy among the Certifying Authorities. In wired networks, this is accomplished through certificate chaining. Wang et al in [2] propose a fully self managed scheme for heterogeneous certification in ad hoc networks, which we discuss in the next section.

R.5. *Robust pre-authentication mechanism:* By pre-authentication mechanism we mean the process of establishing necessary trust between nodes before the actual certificate creation and distribution. Though this is not a part of the certificate authentication process itself, it is pretty important in MANETs. This is because, in order to satisfy R.1, it is mandatory that nodes have prior trust between each other (by exchange of public keys, for example). Without this established, the later mutual authentication and renewal of certificates would not be possible. The Resurrecting Duckling Model proposed by Stajano and Anderson [9] was one of the early works in this field, which involved bootstrapping trust between a “mother” and a “duckling” node over a location-limited channel. Balfanz et al [13] discuss a more user-friendly and efficient approach. A detailed classification of these methods is beyond the scope of this paper.

3. Survey of Related Work

Certificate-based authentication usually consists of three phases. During the first phase or the “bootstrapping” phase, the nodes are issued a certificate by a certifying authority. The certificate is created by the CA using the node’s identity information, such as IP address, name, organization, and its public key. The certificate also consists of the issuing time and the expiration time besides other information. During the second phase the certificate is “renewed” due to its expiration. The third phase involves revocation of the certificate by the CA, possibly due to compromise of the private key of the certificate

holder, or probably because the issuer believes that the user-key binding is no longer valid. Let us now discuss some of the proposed certificate-based mechanisms.

3.1. Self organized public key management - Capkun et al

One of the certificate-based authentication methods proposed by Capkun, Buttyan and Hubaux is by formation of certificate graphs [1]. The suggested approach is similar to PGP certificates [7], apart from the fact that in PGP a central certificate server is used. They define a certificate graph as a directed graph $G(V, E)$ where V and E stand for the set of vertices and the set of edges, respectively. The vertices of the certificate graph represent public keys, and the edges represent certificates. As shown in Figure 1, a directed edge in the graph from vertex K_u to K_v represents the certificate issued by u to v by u 's signing v 's public key K_v with its own private key. In effect, thus, u is the CA for v . G contains only the valid certificates of the whole network.

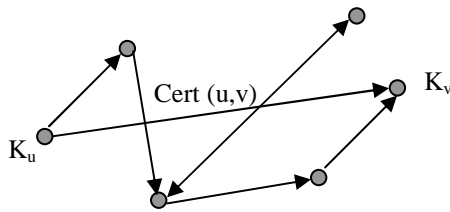


Fig. 1 $K_u \rightarrow K_v$ represents certificate issued to v by u

Each node maintains an updated and non updated local certificate repository, which consist of subset of updated and expired certificates respectively. The authors argue that the use of two repositories is in providing a good estimate of the certificate graph and for node authentication. Whenever a user u wants to verify the authenticity of the public key of another user v , u tries to find a directed path in the graph by merging the updated certificate repository graphs of u and v . The chain of certificates on the path is used to authenticate v . If no path is found then the node merges its non updated and updated certificate repositories to find expired certificates in the path. On finding such a path, it updates the expired certificate, checks the correctness and performs authentication.

The certificate creation phase begins by every node generating its own public-private key pairs. When a new node requests for a new certificate from its neighbor, the issuer verifies the

authenticity of the public key. The authors assume that this is done by pre-exchanging their keys over a side channel. In order to update the certificate graphs in the updated repository, a certificate exchange phase is carried out by exchanging hashes of the certificates with neighboring nodes periodically. There is an upper bound on the convergence times before all the nodes get updated with the certificate graphs. In order to maximize the efficiency of the *updated certificate repository* creation and updating, the authors propose algorithms such as *Maximum degree algorithm* based on finding the path in the certificate graph with highest number of certificates. They also investigate the cost associated and validate it through simulation results.

The authors do not mention any explicit certificate renewal process as it is done whenever a node finds expired certificates in its non-updated certificate repository. They suggest two methods, one explicit and the other implicit, for revocation of the certificates. In the implicit mechanism, the certificates are revoked based on their expiration time. In the explicit method, the issuer sends an explicit revocation statement for the target node that it believes no longer has a valid user-key binding. This is sent to nodes that request the issuer for updates of the certificate for the target node. We believe that this mechanism is prone to attack by a malicious node trying to explicitly revoke other node's certificate by sending false revocation statements to nodes in its vicinity. This may lead to a DoS attack.

The advantage of this mechanism lies in the fully self-organized management of public keys by using certificates. However the drawbacks of this scheme are the expensive tables that have to be maintained for the certificate repositories, and each time a node moves from one locality to another, it has to renegotiate with other nodes and update the tables again.

3.2. Providing Robust and Ubiquitous Security Support for Mobile Ad hoc Networks – Kong et al

In this scheme, the authors propose a distributed certification based on threshold cryptography and shared secrets. The basic goal of a threshold secret sharing method is to share a secret key k among an arbitrarily large community using a secret polynomial $f(x)$. If the degree of $f(x)$ is $(k-1)$, any k members of the community can recover the secret key, while any members less than k reveals no information of the secret [6]. Based on this, a node receives its public key from

its k neighboring nodes. Here, k is a parameter which needs to be carefully tuned so that the method is effective.

The certificate creation process is as follows: Initially all the nodes in the network need to be bootstrapped with their certificates from a trusted central management. When a new node wants to obtain its certificate, it sends a request to its k neighboring nodes requesting for partial certificates. If the coalition thinks that the requesting node is a well-behaved node (for which the authors assume an underlying trust relationship), they issue their partial certificates. This is then combined together by the target node to issue the new certificate using an interpolation function.

The certificate renewal is carried out by specifying a renewal Time T_{renew} . To renew a certificate, a network entity broadcasts its current valid certificate and a future expiration time $T < (\text{current time} + T_{\text{renew}})$ to its k one-hop neighbors. The neighboring nodes check the system public key and the Certificate Revocation List to determine whether to accept or deny the request.

The certificate revocation is carried out by two methods as suggested in [1] by implicit or explicit mechanisms. In the implicit mechanism, the certificates are revoked if the expiration time T_{expire} is lesser than the time of issue plus the time of renewal T_{renew} . In the explicit certificate revocation method, each node maintains a Certificate Revocation List containing those certificates that haven't expired yet. The node periodically consults its CRL for expired certificates and revokes them if necessary.

The basic advantage of this method is that it does not require any centralized certificate authority. However, it relies on each node having at least k one-hop neighbors for authentication. This may not be practical when k is large due to the dynamic nature of the nodes. Further, the certificates cannot be issued to nodes which are more than a hop away. It also requires a bootstrapping phase in order to distribute the system private key among k nodes initially. Certificate distribution initially to all nodes is also a bottle neck.

3.3. Self Managed Heterogeneous Certification in Mobile Ad Hoc Networks – Wang et al

Wang, Zhu and Li [2] propose a novel mechanism in which CAs from different administrative domains can co-exist in the network. They also propose a distributed certificate authority

by using k -threshold secret sharing similar to the method introduced by Kong et al [3]. In order to handle heterogeneous CAs, trust graphs are used. A node A is said to trust node B when node B can be verified as authentic based on B 's digital certificate signed by a CA that A currently trusts. Each node maintains a list of CAs that it trusts.

Whenever a node needs to obtain a certificate, it has to collect K IDs of valid share holders from its one-hop neighbors and constructs the private key. Whenever a node A wishes to authenticate another node B , it begins by sending B its CA list. Similarly B sends A its own CA list. A then compares the two lists to check if there are some common CAs, and if so, A proceeds to send its certificate to B certified by the common CA. B responds by sending its own certificate to A . If the two nodes don't have a common CA, then they proceed to search their one hop and two-hop neighbors through a *Distributed Multi-hop Certificate Request* (DMCR) algorithm.

The steps for certificate renewal are similar to the DMCR scheme. However certificate revocation is not discussed by the authors. The advantages of this mechanism are that cross-certification between CAs in different domains is possible. The certificate discovery mechanism also occurs over *multiple-hops* unlike the previous schemes. However, the disadvantage is that certificate revocation is a costly operation since nodes must maintain certificates from several heterogeneous CAs. The authors however do not discuss this issue.

3.4. Trust- and Clustering-Based Authentication Services in Mobile Ad Hoc Networks – Ngai et al

Ngai et al [4] discuss a trust model and a network model in order to enhance the security of the public key certification. Their network model is based upon hierarchical organization or clustering of the network by some clustering algorithms. The authors perceive that such algorithms improve the security and the efficiency of the network. They assume that the network has been divided into clusters with unique IDs.

Their trust model is based upon the web-of-trust model similar to PGP [7] in which any user can act as the certifying authority. They define trust quantitatively as a continuous value between 0.0 and 1.0. Each node maintains a list of trust values for other nodes in the network. A *direct trust* is defined as a trust relationship between two nodes in the same group and a *recommendation trust* as the trust relationship between nodes of different

groups. In order to build the trust relationship they assume that the nodes are equipped with some detecting component such as watchdog for monitoring the behavior of nodes.

Public key management is assumed to be present within a cluster. Whenever a node wants to authenticate a node in another cluster, it communicates with several other *introducing nodes* in that cluster. It sorts the *introducing nodes* based on their trust values and computes a weighted trust value by combining its trust values of the *introducing nodes* with the trust values of the *introducing nodes* to the target node. The final trust value is then stored and used to evaluate other nodes in that group.

The authors haven't discussed a mechanism for renewal and revocation of the certificates. The advantage of the mechanism is that it is able to discover and isolate a high percentage of malicious nodes when compared to PGP based methods. The disadvantage is that the storage of the trust values and their computation is both memory and time consuming. Further, the mobility of nodes leads to change of membership of nodes in various clusters. The effect of this on authentication has not been discussed.

4. A Brief Comparison of the Certificate-Based Mechanisms

In this section we compare the mechanisms briefly with respect to the requirements described earlier. We do not consider requirement R.5 since it is not a part of the certificate mechanism itself.

4.1. Self Organized Public Key Management - Capkun et al

Requirement	Description
R.1. Distributed authentication	It is a totally distributed certification method since every node acts as a CA.
R.2. Resource awareness	Each node maintains two certificate repositories, which incurs a high overhead.
R.3.(a) Creation	Self-signed certificates, and hence more robust than a shared key based mechanism.
R.3.(b) Renewal	No explicit mechanism discussed.
R.3.(c) Revocation	Explicit revocation causes delay between far-away nodes in the network.

R.4. Heterogeneous certification	Not implemented.
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4.2. Providing Robust and Ubiquitous Security Support for Mobile Ad hoc Networks – Kong et al

Requirement	Description
R.1. Distributed authentication	Totally distributed and scales well to large networks.
R.2. Resource awareness	The generation and distribution of keys using complex polynomial functions is resource-intensive and time consuming.
R.3.(a) Creation	Requires at least k neighbors which might be a bottleneck.
R.3.(b) Renewal	Same as issuance.
R.3.(c) Revocation	System CRL table stored at each node and hence memory intensive.
R.4. Heterogeneous certification	Not implemented.

4.3. Self Managed Heterogeneous Certification in Mobile Ad Hoc Networks – Wang et al

Requirement	Description
R.1. Distributed authentication	Totally distributed and scales well to large networks
R.2. Resource awareness	Each node only maintains a list of its trusted CAs. Thus it is more efficient than method proposed in [1].
R.3.(a) Creation	Similar to K-threshold mechanism [3].
R.3.(b) Renewal	Implemented through the DMCR algorithm.
R.3.(c) Revocation	Not discussed. This might be a bottleneck since CRLs from different domains need to be maintained.
R.4. Heterogeneous certification	Implemented using trust graphs.

4.4. Trust- and Clustering-Based Authentication Services in Mobile Ad Hoc Networks – Ngai et al

Requirement	Description
R.1. Distributed authentication	Distributed and self organized since every node acts as a CA.
R.2. Resource awareness	The maintenance of trust tables and the monitoring components are memory intensive.
R.3.(a) Creation	Across nodes, creation is based on trust values. The existence of introducing nodes may not be true at all times.
R.3.(b) Renewal	Not discussed
R.3.(c) Revocation	Not discussed.
R.4. Heterogeneous certification	Not implemented

5. Scenarios and metrics for evaluation of the certificate-based authentication mechanisms

In order to study the effectiveness of these mechanisms, we propose a set of realistic “scenarios” for simulation. In order to define any scenario, we first need to define some parameters. Let us first take a look at these parameters:

5.1. Parameters for defining the scenarios

5.1.1. Mobility model. A mobility model represents the realistic movements of nodes or the mobile users in the network. They can be primarily classified as entity mobility models and group mobility models. Camp et al. give a broader classification of these models [11]. The most commonly used mobility model by the research community is the RWM (Random Waypoint Model) which uses pause times and random changes in destination and speed. However, the randomness doesn’t suit well to certain scenarios such as a battlefield, where the mobility is more predictive. Further, the model also fails to provide a “steady-state” over a long simulation period [14]. Thus, the mobility models should be chosen carefully while evaluating a certificate-based authentication mechanism. It must model the realistic scenario as closely as possible. For

example, we can introduce some obstacles in the path of the nodes. We discuss some more models in a later section.

5.1.2. Node Density. The node density also varies according to a particular scenario. For example, an event coverage scenario may have a high density of nodes whereas a disaster recovery scenario might have a low density as the nodes are spread out over a wide area.

5.1.3. Traffic rates. The traffic rates vary according to the node linkage failures, congestion and mobility. The sources and type of traffic (for example, CBR, TCP or UDP) must also be taken into account while defining the scenario. Normally, the traffic type used is Constant Bit Rate (CBR). The packet rate and size for a realistic scenario could be 4 packets/sec and 512 bytes respectively.

5.2. Some Realistic Scenarios

Let us now look at some of the scenarios and their parameters which can be used for simulations.

5.2.1. Scenarios based on Group mobility models. For group models, we use the Reference Point Group Mobility model (RPGM) [11]. This is a group mobility model where each group has a logical center (similar to a troop head) that determines the group behavior. This model can be used for applications such as battlefield, rescue operations, disaster recovery, etc. Figure 2 gives an idea of the RPGM model (only the movements are depicted for simplicity).

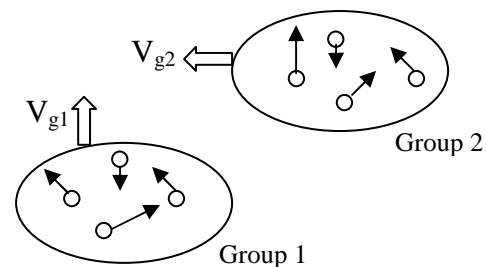


Fig. 2 Reference Point Group mobility model

In this model, each member within the group elects a group head. The nodes within a group move randomly according to the RWM, but overall the group movement is determined by the leader. Let’s now look at some scenarios tailored for real-world applications. The following table gives the suggested parameters for the battlefield scenario.

SCENARIO I	
Scenario	Battlefield
Mobility model	RPGM
Number of nodes	10 in each group 5 groups
Area	2000 * 2000 m
Speed	Node speed: 5 m/s Group speed : 1 m/s

SCENARIO II	
Scenario	Rescue Operation
Mobility model	RPGM
Number of nodes	5 in each group 10 groups
Area	1000 * 1000 m
Speed	Node speed: 2 m/s Group speed : 5 m/s

5.2.2. Scenarios based on entity mobility models.

The most commonly used entity mobility model is the Random Waypoint. However, for realistic scenarios we use other models. In scenario III, we use the Manhattan Grid model which models city section traffic. The nodes represent vehicles and they can communicate with other vehicles in the ad hoc mode.

SCENARIO III	
Scenario	City traffic
Mobility model	Manhattan Grid
Number of nodes	50
Area	1500 * 500 m
Speed	Node speed: 20 m/s

SCENARIO IV	
Scenario	Event Coverage
Mobility model	Gauss Markov Model
Number of nodes	50
Area	500 * 500 m
Speed	Node speed: 2 m/s Group speed : 5 m/s

For Scenario IV we use the Gauss Markov model since we can vary the degree of randomness in this pattern.

In each of the scenarios, the node speed and the group speed may be varied to study the effect of mobility on the metrics that we define in the next section. This will allow us to compare the mechanisms for the various scenarios we have defined.

5.3. Metrics

Having defined the parameters for the scenarios, our next step is to define the metrics based on which the authentication mechanisms can be evaluated. Some of these have been adapted from [3]. The following metrics have been identified.

5.3.1. Successful Certification Ratio μ . This measures the ratio of the number of successful certification services (including issuance, NC_{REN} , and renewal, NC_{ISS} , respectively) to the total number of requests for such services ($NC_{TOT-REN}$ and $NC_{TOT-ISS}$, respectively). It includes both certificate issuance and certificate renewal. If we consider μ_{REN} as the successful certification renewal ratio, and μ_{ISS} as the successful certificate issuance ratio, then their respective value can be calculated as follows:

$$\mu_{REN} = \frac{NC_{REN}}{NC_{TOT-REN}} \quad \mu_{ISS} = \frac{NC_{ISS}}{NC_{TOT-ISS}}$$

Here, NC_{REN} and NC_{ISS} are the total number of certificate renewed and issued, respectively. $NC_{TOT-REN}$ and $NC_{TOT-ISS}$ are the number of requests for certificate issuance and renewal, respectively. This metric gives an idea about the efficiency of the mechanism in providing successful certification services.

5.3.2. Settling time (st). This metric measures the initial time taken for all the nodes in the network to be issued valid certificates. The value of st can be calculated as the difference between the time when all the nodes are issued valid certificates and the starting time when the process of certificate issuance begins.

The settling time taken will depend on factors such as the number of malicious or non-cooperative nodes, the algorithm used for key generation and distribution, etc. If the pre-authentication methods are efficient (R.5), then the settling time will be less.

5.3.3. Frequency of Certification (f_{cert}). This metric measures the number of certification services per time interval.

$$f_{cert} = \frac{N_{cert}}{T_{int}}$$

Here N_{cert} is the total number of certification services (issuance/renewal) by nodes in the network, and T_{int} is the simulation time. The rationale behind this metric is as follows: As the topology of the network changes, it is expected that there will be frequent certificate issuance and renewal processes. This incurs a lot of overhead since each time a node wants to create or renew its certificate, costly computations have to be carried out for the public key mechanism. We intuitively predict that a distributed and self-organized mechanism will have a lower frequency of certificate creation, renewal and revocation, and hence, a lower f_{cert} .

5.3.4. Average Certification Delay. The *average certification delay (ACD)* is measured as the time delay between the certificate service request (CSReq) and the certificate service reply (CSRep) averaged over the simulation time. This will depend on the time complexity of the algorithm and gives an estimate of the efficiency of the algorithm.

$$ACD = \frac{\sum_{i=1..n}(CSRep_i - CSReq_i)}{T_{\text{int}}}$$

6. Summary and Future Work

Successful authentication operations in mobile ad hoc networks are critical for assuring secure and effective operation of the supported application, especially in distributed field applications where mobile nodes are spread over a large geographical area. Several certificate-based authentication mechanisms have been proposed for MANETs. In this paper we survey some of these mechanisms, and charted out the requirements for any certificate-based authentication scheme for MANETs. We also propose a few experimental scenarios and metrics, based on which a simulation study of these methods are currently under way, using network simulators ns-2 and OPNET. An analytical and empirical comparison of these methods will help the research community in designing more robust and efficient authentication mechanisms based on digital certificates.

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