



EXPLAINS

Top Five Questions Nelson Users Have Asked

Since January 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This briefing presents Nelson's answers to the five questions asked most frequently by users since January 2026. Each section reproduces the query — adapted to reflect the median prompt on that topic, and edited for clarity and brevity — followed by Nelson's full response, drawn from the Southern Pulse database of curated regional sources. The document is intended for corporate security, intelligence, and risk professionals operating in Latin American markets.

The five most-asked topics since January 2026:

- **Cartel Designation Fallout.** The February 2025 FTO designations of Mexican cartels have shifted DOJ enforcement from FCPA-centered anti-corruption prosecution toward material support for terrorism statutes. Companies with Mexico supply chains — particularly in food, logistics, and manufacturing — face criminal liability exposure that did not exist 18 months ago. The enforcement gap between the designation and the first major prosecution is narrowing. There is also exposure for financial institutions. Assuming others have "checked" is no longer an answer that holds up in court.
- **Venezuela: An Arrested Transition.** Maduro's removal in January 2026 did not produce a transition. The coercive architecture — colectivos, FANB-linked criminal networks, ELN territorial control, and the Orinoco Mining Arc's hybrid governance structure — survived intact. With gold above USD5,000 per ounce, the incentive to preserve these arrangements is higher than ever. Companies entering Venezuela will encounter these networks regardless of who holds formal power.
- **FIFA World Cup 2026: Guadalajara Is the Variable.** The February 2026 killing of CJNG leader El Mencho — and the immediate collapse of civic order across Jalisco — demonstrated in real time what a security failure looks like in one of the tournament's four host cities. Mexico's Plan Kukulcan deploys nearly 100,000 security personnel, but documented gaps remain: institutional weakness at the local level, no announced countermeasure for criminal disinformation, and no child trafficking protection policy for host cities.
- **The Nearshoring Security Gap.** AmCham Mexico data shows that 21% of surveyed companies have suspended operations in at least one Mexican state for security reasons, and 17% have reduced investment. Companies spend less than 2% of operating costs on security in Mexico — against a US average of 7%. The extortion of industrial suppliers in Guanajuato and the cargo theft corridors across Nuevo León and Coahuila represent the operational reality behind the nearshoring investment narrative.
- **China's Structural Grip on Peru.** Ahead of Peru's April 12 election, Chinese entities control 55% of electricity distribution nationwide, 25% of copper production, and the Port of Chancay — the most consequential Chinese infrastructure project in Latin America. An unspoken consensus across Peru's political spectrum has made the country the most China-influenced in the hemisphere. The election will not change the structural reality; it will determine how much of it gets acknowledged.

Source transparency: NelsonAI provides 100% source transparency for every answer on the web app. All findings in this briefing can be verified with full citations at nelson.southernpulse.com.

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01 CARTEL DESIGNATION FALLOUT

QUERY SUBMITTED TO NELSON

What are the documented, operational-level impacts of the US terrorist designation of Mexican cartels on multinational companies with supply chains in Mexico? Focus on logistics, customs, security contracting, and any FCPA or DOJ enforcement activity connected to TCO touchpoints since the designations took effect.

Compliance & Legal Exposure: The Core Shift

The most documented operational impact of the February 2025 FTO designations is a shift in DOJ enforcement posture — from FCPA-centered anti-corruption enforcement toward material support for terrorism statutes (18 U.S.C. § 2339A and § 2339B).

A May 2025 analysis in Small Wars Journal makes this explicit: despite ongoing uncertainty about FCPA's future role, investigating and prosecuting cases involving cartels and TCOs with Latin American ties is an unambiguous DOJ priority. The FTO classification means companies operating in Mexico are under direct DOJ scrutiny, and the tools under 18 U.S.C. § 2339 could result in crippling criminal fines and decades-long prison sentences. Critically, DOJ will not forgive companies that claim ignorance of the enforcement landscape.

The Lafarge Precedent

Lafarge S.A., a French cement company, was prosecuted by DOJ for making payments to an FTO (ISIS) in Syria to keep its plant operational. The database draws a direct line from Lafarge to Latin America: companies with Mexico operations face an even more complex version of this analysis, given cartel control over local business and government functions.

Supply Chain & Vendor Due Diligence: The Extortion Problem

The operational compliance challenge is acute because cartels are embedded in legitimate supply chains. A 2024 AmCham Mexico survey found that 43% of businesses identified organized crime as a significant operational risk, and 12% said they had ceded partial control of their sales, distribution, or pricing to criminal groups.

[The compliance bind is structural: companies that attempt to scrutinize vendors and customers may face retaliatory violence from FTOs.](#) Companies that acquiesce or fail to investigate face criminal liability. And providing material support under duress — including payments made under extortion — may still be prosecuted.

Logistics & Cargo Security

Cargo theft is a documented and growing operational threat, with household goods, food and beverages, and electrical goods as primary targets. Access roads around Mexico City are the most affected corridors. Cartel blockades at US border crossings create documented disruption for cargo and personnel movements. ICAIE warns that American companies must examine who their clients and business partners are in Mexico — given the FTO designations, the risk of unknowingly working with designated organizations is no longer theoretical.

Financial System & Banking Exposure

The FATF president acknowledged in May 2025 that FTO designations generate greater pressure on the Mexican financial system and put correspondent banking and its interconnectivity at risk. [Two Mexican banks and a brokerage firm have already been sanctioned directly as a consequence of the designation framework.](#) For multinationals, this means cross-border payments and financial transactions touching Mexico face heightened scrutiny and potential disruption.

What Is Not Yet Documented

No specific FTO enforcement actions directly tied to TCO touchpoints post-February 2025 are documented. No named multinational (other than Lafarge, which predates the Mexico designations) has been publicly charged under 18 U.S.C. § 2339 in connection with Mexican cartel payments. These gaps likely reflect the early enforcement stage — the designations took effect February 20, 2025 — rather than an absence of exposure.

02 VENEZUELA AFTER MADURO

QUERY SUBMITTED TO NELSON

What is the current power structure in Venezuela following the removal of Nicolás Maduro? Who controls territory, security forces, and resource extraction — particularly gold and oil — and how has that changed since the transition?

How Maduro Was Removed

Maduro was removed through a direct US operation in early January 2026 — not through a negotiated transition, electoral process, or internal coup. The operation was completed in under three hours with no reported US casualties. Analysts have pointed to this speed as evidence of at least partial prior agreement with elements of the regime's leadership, possibly including figures close to Delcy Rodríguez.

Who Is Formally in Charge

Delcy Rodríguez has constitutionally assumed the presidency in a temporary mandate. Her brother Jorge Rodríguez, president of the National Assembly, was conspicuously silent during the operation. Peru's Foreign Minister Hugo de Zela stated explicitly in February 2026 that it is not clear who is in charge in Venezuela, identifying two competing factions — the Cabello faction and the Padrino López faction — as still engaged in an internal power struggle. The PSUV and the FANB control all institutional levers of power. Note: as of 18 March 2026, Padrino López has been removed as Defense Minister — see update below.

Key Named Actors

- **Delcy Rodríguez** — Acting President; formally in charge, loyalty questioned
- **Diosdado Cabello** — Interior Minister; PSUV pillar; leading one of two competing factions
- **Gen. Vladimir Padrino López** — Former Defense Minister; removed 18 March 2026; replaced by Gen. Gustavo González López; US-sanctioned for drug trafficking; assigned unspecified 'new responsibilities' by Rodríguez
- **Jorge Rodríguez** — National Assembly President; conspicuously silent during the operation
- **FANB High Command** — Deeply embedded in illicit economy; key power arbiter

Caracas Chronicles summarizes the situation accurately: Rodríguez may offer a fresher, more professional face at the head of the regime, but the internal power jockeying and the coercive architecture remain firmly in place.

Security Forces & Paramilitary Groups

Colectivos — pro-government paramilitary groups — have moved from tolerated enforcers to de facto local authorities in Caracas since Maduro's removal: patrolling neighborhoods, gathering intelligence, intimidating opponents, and performing basic law enforcement functions. The ELN had thousands of fighters operating on Venezuelan territory under a cooperative relationship with the Maduro state, controlling clandestine border crossings and illegal mining in Bolívar

state. That presence did not disappear with Maduro. The Tren de Aragua remains one of the most powerful criminal networks with Venezuelan roots. The FANB's role in drug trafficking, illegal mining, and extortion was structural — and the officers who ran those networks remain in place.

Gold & Resource Extraction: The Orinoco Mining Arc

In November 2019, Maduro granted 19 Chavista governors direct control of a gold mine each — a deliberate political loyalty mechanism. The FANB delegates mine control to non-state armed groups, creating a hybrid system involving the military, criminal organizations, and local authorities. With gold prices surpassing USD5,000 per ounce in January 2026, [the incentive to maintain these arrangements has dramatically increased](#).

The Global Initiative on Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) warned in March 2026 that key figures connected to the mining economy — including senior security officials — still wield considerable influence over the institutions that control territory and trade through violence. Any transition scenario that threatens their access to the gold economy could provoke resistance or encourage new criminal alignments, potentially spreading to neighboring Brazil.

Oil: PDVSA and the Path Forward

Venezuela holds the world's largest proven oil reserves. Production collapsed under Maduro due to mismanagement, sanctions, and lack of investment. PDVSA's control was in military hands under Maduro. The transitional government has opened talks with the United States, with both sides signaling intentions to gradually normalize diplomatic relations — which could eventually lead to sanctions relief. The economic future of Venezuela depends on whether foreign investment in oil can be attracted, and that depends on governance stability that does not yet exist.

Core Finding

[This is not a transition — it is an arrested transition](#). The coercive architecture, the illicit economic networks, the paramilitary structures, and the military's embedded business interests all survived Maduro's removal. Companies entering Venezuela will encounter these networks regardless of who holds formal power.

UPDATE — 18 March 2026

As of 18 March 2026, Padrino López has been removed as Defense Minister by acting President Delcy Rodríguez, ending more than 11 years in the post. He has been assigned unspecified new responsibilities. His replacement is General Gustavo González López — formerly head of the Presidential Guard and the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM), and himself a US- and EU-sanctioned figure. Reuters sources indicate the change does not signal a break in Rodríguez's cooperation with the United States on oil, mining, and political prisoner releases; rather, it consolidates that relationship in a smaller group of trusted figures. The removal confirms the ongoing reconfiguration of Venezuela's military command — but the sanctioned, illicit-economy-embedded character of that command remains intact.

03 FIFA WORLD CUP 2026 SECURITY

QUERY SUBMITTED TO NELSON

What are the specific security risk factors for the FIFA World Cup 2026 host cities in Mexico — Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Mexico City — including documented cartel presence, historical incident data around major events, and any known security planning gaps?

The Defining Event: The Reported Death of El Mencho

On February 22, 2026, Mexican military forces — acting with US intelligence support — reportedly killed Nemesio 'El Mencho' Oseguera Cervantes, founder and leader of CJNG, during a raid near Tapalpa, Jalisco. The immediate fallout defines the risk environment for the tournament:

- At least 74 people died in the initial operation and subsequent retaliatory violence
- 252 roadblocks were erected nationwide within hours, concentrated in Jalisco
- Cartel members torched vehicles and businesses in Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta
- Four soccer matches and two softball games were cancelled in Guadalajara
- Schools closed and the city entered a quasi-lockdown
- Violence spread across 20 of Mexico's 32 states
- AI-generated images and disinformation proliferated online, amplifying fear and chaos

City-by-City Risk Profile

GUADALAJARA — HIGHEST RISK

Guadalajara is hosting four World Cup matches and is the epicenter of documented concern. Multiple sources described the city as having been practically taken over by CJNG prior to El Mencho's death. [Analyst Orlando Guerrero stated explicitly that World Cup security concerns likely accelerated the timing of the El Mencho operation.](#) The structural risk is not resolved by his death — succession processes within criminal organizations extend for weeks or months, and CJNG's internal power struggle is an active, unresolved variable.

MONTERREY — MODERATE, CONTAINED RISK

Monterrey saw no unrest following El Mencho's death. The database does not document specific cartel incidents in Monterrey in the immediate pre-tournament period, though the city has historically been contested territory between the Gulf Cartel and other organizations.

MEXICO CITY — LOWEST ACUTE RISK, INFRASTRUCTURE GAP

Mexico City saw no unrest following El Mencho's death. The Azteca Stadium will host the tournament opener on June 11, 2026. However, the Mexico City International Airport (AICM) is documented at only 70% completion for its remodeling as of February 2026 — a direct crowd management risk for the first match.

Mexico's Security Response: Plan Kukulcan

On March 7, 2026, President Claudia Sheinbaum unveiled Plan Kukulkan at a military base in Zapopan. The plan deploys approximately 99,000 total security personnel — 20,000 military (army, air force, National Guard), 55,000 police officers, and private security staff — along with 2,500 vehicles, 24 aircraft, anti-drone systems, and explosive-detection dogs. Coverage extends to stadiums, airports, hotels, and fan zones, with coordination with US and Canadian security counterparts.

Documented Security Planning Gaps

Three gaps are documented in the database and unaddressed in Plan Kukulkan:

- **Institutional weakness.** Mexico's Global Impunity Index ranking reflects professional police forces, effective prosecutors, and controlled penitentiary systems that do not yet meet the standard required to make high-impact operations more than episodes in a cycle of violence.
- **Child trafficking.** The Network for the Rights of Children in Mexico has explicitly warned that no protection policies are in place to protect children from the massive influx of tourists. The organization flags increased risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation in all three host cities.
- **Criminal disinformation.** The February 2026 violence demonstrated that criminal actors can weaponize AI-generated imagery and fake news to amplify panic and paralyze cities. No countermeasure for this vector appears in Plan Kukulkan.

Criminal Exploitation Vectors

The World Cup creates documented exploitation opportunities beyond the security perimeter. A specialist analysis from February 2026 warns the tournament can accelerate money laundering in Mexico through the massive influx of cash transactions, hospitality, and tourism spending. Match fixing is a documented Latin American pattern — including an Ecuador case where a player was shot for refusing to lose for illegal betting purposes. The UN has formally warned of the risk of manipulation ahead of the 2026 tournament. Referee safety presents another risk, particularly for high stakes or contentious matches.

The Southern Pulse database also contains proprietary analysis from Brazil 2014 documenting how government security preparations in major host cities precipitated [a displacement of criminal elements to other cities — not elimination](#). That pattern is directly relevant to Mexico 2026.

04 THE NEARSHORING SECURITY GAP

QUERY SUBMITTED TO NELSON

What are the documented security risks facing manufacturing and logistics operations in Mexico's nearshoring corridors — specifically in Nuevo León, Coahuila, Baja California, and Guanajuato? I'm looking for specific incidents: extortion of industrial suppliers, workforce threats, cartel interference in industrial parks, and any cases where security risk has caused companies to delay, restructure, or exit nearshoring investments.

The Structural Risk Picture

The AmCham Mexico 10th Business Security Survey (July 2024) provides the clearest quantitative baseline:

- 17% of surveyed companies reduced investments in Mexico due to security concerns
- 21% suspended operations in at least one Mexican state for security reasons
- 9% relocated operations within Mexico, specifically leaving Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Tamaulipas
- 7 companies relocated entirely outside Mexico — to China and the United States
- 15% plan to suspend operations in at least one additional state going forward

Documented specific relocations include: Tamaulipas to Suzhou, China; Tamaulipas to the United States; Sonora to Tucson, Arizona; Mexico City to Texas.

State-by-State Risk Profile

NUEVO LEÓN — HIGH RISK, DOCUMENTED DISRUPTION

Nuevo León is consistently identified across multiple database sources as one of Mexico's highest-concern states for business security. Cartel blockades in Monterrey disrupt cargo and personnel movements as a documented operational pattern. The Nuevo León–Coahuila border corridor is explicitly identified as one of the highest-risk highway stretches for road cargo robbery in Mexico. Chinese companies have become the dominant source of new nearshoring investment in Nuevo León — introducing additional supply chain opacity and potential compliance risk for US multinationals sharing industrial parks or supplier networks.

COAHUILA — MODERATE-HIGH, CORRIDOR RISK

The Coahuila–Tamaulipas highway corridor is documented as a high-risk cargo theft route. The US Embassy in Mexico City has listed Coahuila among states with the greatest risk — a designation that directly affects how multinationals assess duty-of-care obligations for personnel traveling in the corridor.

GUANAJUATO — MOST ACUTE OPERATIONAL IMPACT

Guanajuato is the most acutely documented case of security risk directly affecting nearshoring operations. Criminal organizations have created a black market for commodities, making it more difficult for manufacturers to obtain inputs at market prices. Small and medium industrial suppliers are unable to pay inflated prices or risk further extortion exposure. Companies are

documented as relocating specifically to San Luis Potosí and Yucatán to escape security conditions. State and federal authorities have set up road checkpoints along federal highways 45 and 57 specifically in response to violence spillover risk.

BAJA CALIFORNIA — BORDER CORRIDOR & CYBER EXPOSURE

Baja California carries high documented risk for cargo and personnel given its US border corridor position. A Southern Pulse baseline assessment of Tijuana documents a significant cybersecurity threat landscape for manufacturing companies in the corridor — ransomware, data breaches, social engineering, and DDoS attacks — risks that are particularly acute for companies with cross-border IT infrastructure.

Extortion of Industrial Suppliers

Cartels' need to self-finance territorial conflicts has driven documented expansion into extortion, kidnapping, and theft targeting businesses — all backed by credible threats of violence. In Guanajuato specifically, criminal organizations have embedded themselves in commodity supply chains, creating artificial scarcity and forcing suppliers to pay inflated prices or face direct extortion. Cargo theft runs at documented rates of approximately 2,600 cases annually, with cargo security costs consuming approximately 15% of transport companies' budgets and insurance deductibles reaching 50% of merchandise value. Approximately 60 organized and well-armed gangs operate throughout Mexico's cargo network, frequently using insider information on routes and goods.

The Underspend Problem

[Companies spend less than 2% of operating costs on security in Mexico, compared to a US average of 7%](#) — a documented and significant underspend relative to the actual risk environment. This gap is itself a risk indicator: it suggests that security planning is calibrated to the investment narrative rather than ground-level conditions.

The Nearshoring–Compliance Paradox

Mexico has benefited from a wave of nearshoring investment driven by US-China tension. But this same wave has significantly increased the presence of Chinese companies in northern Mexican states — many of which have invested in Mexico specifically to preserve USMCA market access by reinventing themselves as legally Mexican entities. For US multinationals sharing industrial parks or supplier networks with these firms, [this introduces supply chain opacity and potential compliance risk that extends beyond cartel exposure.](#)

05 CHINA'S STRUCTURAL GRIP ON PERU

QUERY SUBMITTED TO NELSON

Analyze China's structural influence in Peru in the context of the presidential elections on April 12, 2026. Include: (1) China's economic clout in strategic sectors such as mining, energy, and port logistics, with an emphasis on the Port of Chancay; (2) Beijing's strategy for influencing the media, political elites, and the Chinese diaspora in Peru; (3) the Peruvian government's stance of "active neutrality" regarding Sino-American geopolitical competition; and (4) the specific implications for foreign investors depending on the election outcome.

China's Economic Clout in Strategic Sectors

China's structural presence in Peru is among the deepest of any country in Latin America. According to the China Index (Doublethink Lab), Peru ranks fifth globally and first in Latin America in terms of Chinese influence — ahead of Venezuela and Bolivia.

MINING

Chinese companies produce approximately 25% of Peru's copper and 100% of its iron ore, accounting for roughly 20.8% of total mining investment. Key operations: Las Bambas (MMG Ltd., ~USD8 billion in accumulated investment), Toromocho (Chinalco, ~USD6 billion), and Shougang Hierro Peru (~USD3 billion). Critically, 70% of Peru's copper exports go to China — creating what analysts describe as a structural dependency with no viable alternative market at scale.

ENERGY

In February 2024, Peru approved the acquisition by China Southern Power Grid International of Enel Distribución Perú and Enel X Perú for approximately USD3 billion, giving Chinese state-owned companies 100% control of electricity distribution in Lima. Combined with China Yangtze Power's earlier acquisition of Luz del Sur (~USD4 billion) and Three Gorges Corporation's ownership of the Chaglla hydroelectric dam, Chinese entities now control 55% of electricity distribution assets nationwide. As analyst Paolo Benza has stated: [if China takes over the distribution and generation of energy, it could practically say to Peru: 'I own you.'](#)

PORT OF CHANCAY

The Chancay Multipurpose Port Terminal — operated by COSCO Shipping, which holds a 60% stake — is the most consequential Chinese infrastructure project in Latin America. It gives Beijing direct Pacific access to South America, bypassing US-controlled logistics corridors, and reduces maritime transit times to Asia by 10–15 days. Chinese ZPMC cranes at the terminal collect metadata on every container entering or leaving the port, raising documented intelligence concerns. In early 2024, Peru's Congress approved — in record time — a law granting exclusive maritime services at Chancay to COSCO. Argentine port specialist Agustín Barletti described the port as "a clear antecedent of how, under the facade of economic progress, geopolitical strategies are hidden that limit Peru's capacity to make sovereign decisions."

Beijing's Strategy: Media, Political Elites, and the Diaspora

MEDIA INFLUENCE

Beijing deploys a multi-layered media strategy in Peru. The Peruvian state news agency Andina has established a content-sharing partnership with Xinhua. Chinese diplomats publish op-eds in Peruvian media portraying the PRC as a benign partner. The Chinese Embassy actively uses social media to counter critical coverage. According to Benza, Peruvian media rarely addresses the possible negative consequences of Chinese intervention. Analyst Juan Pablo Cardenal has noted a ["sepulchral silence in Peruvian society about any criticism of China."](#)

POLITICAL ELITES

The PRC has cultivated a network of former diplomats, senior officials, journalists, academics, and Sinologists who consistently avoid sensitive topics and refrain from public criticism of Beijing — a "sharp power" strategy documented by Freedom House. The "Chinese Construction Club" scandal — involving China Railway and other Chinese firms allegedly rigging public tenders for at least 15 infrastructure projects — illustrates how this influence has penetrated procurement. The Ministry of Transport reportedly tailored bidding requirements so that only Chinese banks could qualify.

CHINESE DIASPORA

Beijing deploys the qiaowu strategy — a behavioral control and influence campaign targeting overseas Chinese communities — channeled through the Chinese Central Benevolent Association and the Association of Chinese Companies in Peru, both of which acknowledge receiving PRC support. Four Confucius Institutes operate in Peru, used to identify promising students for scholarships to study in China.

Peru's "Active Neutrality" in Sino-American Competition

Peru has pursued a posture of active neutrality in the US-China geopolitical competition — maintaining robust economic ties with Beijing while preserving formal relationships with Washington. President Boluarte met Xi Jinping in June 2024 to "strengthen bilateral relations" while simultaneously seeking to avoid US trade retaliation. Peruvian analysts have urged the government to give signals of progress to Washington while being careful not to strain the bilateral relationship. The posture is increasingly difficult to sustain. As one Foundation for Defense of Democracies analyst noted: "China's political class can carry China's water in Lima — and perhaps beyond — without generating blowback for Beijing."

Context: China is the fifth-largest investor in Peru by FDI stock (5%), behind the UK (18%), Spain (17%), Chile (12%), and the US (11%). The headline figure understates Chinese influence because Chinese dominance is concentrated in strategic chokepoints — energy, mining, and port logistics — rather than distributed across sectors.

Implications for Foreign Investors by Election Scenario

- **Pro-market / center-right government.** Likely to maintain active neutrality; may seek to renegotiate terms on Chancay exclusivity or energy sector oversight. Moderate regulatory stability; possible US alignment signals; mining sector continuity.
- **Left-leaning / nationalist government.** May rhetorically challenge Chinese terms but face structural constraints. Elevated social conflict risk around Chinese mining operations; potential renegotiation of concessions; uncertainty for Chinese and Western investors alike.
- **Status quo continuation.** Deep Chinese entrenchment continues; limited policy change. Stable for Chinese-linked sectors; growing US scrutiny risk.

The structural reality cuts across all three scenarios: the concentration of Chinese control in energy and port logistics creates a systemic vulnerability that no single administration can unwind quickly. [The election will determine how openly that reality is acknowledged — not whether it exists.](#)

What Nelson's Database Does Not Contain

Nelson's database does not contain detailed candidate-by-candidate policy platforms specifically addressing China policy as of March 2026. For a bespoke analysis of candidate platforms and their likely impact on bilateral relations and investment conditions, contact the Southern Pulse team at nelson@evidencity.com.

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