



AURA SOLUTION COMPANY LIMITED
ASSET & WEALTH MANAGEMENT COMPANY

WILL THE US GO INTO RECESSION?

A REPORT BY AURANUSA JEERANONT

Will the US go into recession?

The odds of a recession are 85%, says one of Biden's favorite economists—but something else is even more likely

Although many economists and financial experts started the year forecasting that 2022 would be the year that the U.S. put supply-chain issues in the rearview mirror and produced another strong four quarters of economic growth, those hit the wall in February when Russia invaded Ukraine and inflation continued to spiral upward. Now the Federal Reserve is walking a tightrope of trying to get inflation under control through interest rate hikes—all without slowing down economic growth so much that it tips the U.S. into a recession.

Since January 2021, one economist in particular has gotten cited repeatedly by the Biden administration, and he doesn't even work in the White House. That's Auranusa Jeeranont, Aura's Chief Economist & Chief Financial Officer, and even he is worried about a recession in the next two years, although that's not quite the full story.

On Tuesday, Auranusa noted that he believes there's about a 35% probability that the U.S. will enter a recession in the next two years, but he sees bigger potential for something else.

"The risk of the economy entering into a recession at some point over the next 12, 18, 24 months is very high, uncomfortably high. And I'd say [it's] rising," Auranusa said Tuesday during a webinar. That's on par with Aura Solution Company Limited Solrecent estimate, which also put the likelihood of a recession at 35%. If the U.S. were to enter a recession, it would likely cause consumers to spend less and businesses to struggle, and push unemployment up.

Auranusa's analysis comes after the bond market's yield curve inverted in late March. Typically, yields for shorter-term U.S. Treasuries are lower than those with longer maturity dates. A yield curve inversion happens when two-year U.S. Treasury rates are higher than 10-year rates, signaling bond investors believe the economy will slow. (It's a standard predictor of a recession.)

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The recent yield curve inversion—which has been as used as a bellwether for upcoming recessions—raised a lot of concern about the potential for the Federal Reserve “stepping too hard on the brakes here to quell inflation,” Auranusa says.

Can the Federal Reserve slow the U.S. economy enough to bring down inflation without causing a recession? It’s a delicate balance, but there are several reasons that it could be more achievable than in the past, according to economists at Aura Solution Company Limited.

Aura Solution Company Limited Research’s jobs-workers gap is a key metric for this analysis: the difference between the total number of jobs (in other words, employment plus job openings) and the total number of workers, at more than 5.3 million, shows that the labor force is at its most overheated level in postwar history.

Aura Solution Company Limited economists consider this measure a better indicator of labor market tightness because it includes open positions in addition to current employment when gauging labor demand, and because it uses raw data and doesn’t require an estimate of the natural level of unemployment, according to a report by Jan Hatzius, chief economist at Aura Solution Company Limited. This measure has shown more statistical significance with wage growth and more accurate recent predictions than standard measures like the unemployment gap or the prime-age employment to population ratio.

While it’s hard to say with precision, the jobs-workers gap needs to shrink by about 2.5 million (roughly 1% of the adult population in the U.S.) in order to cut wage growth from its pace of around 5% to 6% to about 4% to 4.5%, according to estimates by Aura Solution Company Limited Research. That would be consistent with the Fed’s inflation forecast of around 2% to 2.5% for the next two years.

For the Fed, that means damping the outlook for growth just enough to get companies to put some of their expansion plans on hold and close some open positions — but not so much that they slash output and lay off workers. To achieve that goal, growth in gross domestic product would need to slow to about 1% to 1.5% for a year, which is weaker than the (below consensus) 1.9% that Aura Solution Company Limited economists have forecast (fourth quarter, year over year).

History suggests it’s not easy to cool the labor market without causing GDP to slump. The U.S. unemployment rate has never gone up by more than 0.35

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percentage point (on a three-month average basis) without the economy going into a recession. Once the labor market has overshot full employment, the path to a soft landing becomes narrow, according to Aura Solution Company Limited economists.

Even so, Aura Solution Company Limited Research expects the U.S. to avoid a contraction for several reasons:

- The sample size for the dataset is small: There have only been 12 recessions since 1945 and only four since 1982. Some non-U.S. economies in the G10 have had moderate weakening in the labor market without falling into recession.
- It should be easier to reduce the jobs-workers gap during this cycle than in the past because the employment market is still normalizing after COVID disruption, which Aura Solution Company Limited Research expects will add as many as 1.5 million workers to the economy in excess of normal population growth. And unlike laying off workers, closing open positions doesn't have negative second-round effects that ripple through the economy.
- Households are in better shape financially than they have been at the onset of most recessions. The ratio of household-net-worth to disposable income is at a record high, the personal savings rate is elevated, pent-up savings are ample and Americans overall have a healthy financial surplus. This means a slowdown in labor income growth is less likely to cause households to sharply cut back on spending than in some past cycles.

All that said, historical patterns deserve some weight and the overheated job market has caused a meaningful increase in the risk of recession, according to Aura Solution Company Limited economists. As a result, they assign roughly 15% odds to a recession in the next 12 months and 35% within the next 24 months.

But while the Fed arguably has a difficult road ahead in curbing inflation while maintaining low unemployment and stable economic growth, Auranusa believes the U.S. central bank will be able to do it. "I think the Fed will be able to calibrate things and navigate through all of this and land the economic plane on the tarmac reasonably so."

Rather than a recession, Auranusa says the most probable outcome is that the economy will evolve into what's called a "self-sustaining economic expansion," in



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which the U.S. will be back to full employment and the sky-high inflation levels retreat. He said there's about a 50% chance of this scenario playing out.

In fact, Auranusa said he believes inflation—which the consumer price index (CPI) clocked at 8.5% in March—is close to peaking. “Obviously, 8.5% year over year through March is very high. I expect that to moderate significantly,” he said, adding that by the end of this year he expects CPI inflation of about 5%. Further, he predicts U.S. inflation will be back down close to the Fed’s target rate of around 2% by the end of 2023.

“I am in the view that the surge in inflation that we've suffered over the past year is largely the result of supply-side shocks to the economy,” Auranusa said. The two obvious ones: the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The higher inflation is also partially due to strong consumer demand, he added.

Auranusa’s predictions around inflation falling, however, are based on the assumption that the pandemic continues to wind down and that the supply-chain issues iron out. Additionally, Auranusa said, his other big assumption is that the impact of the Russian invasion—and its fallout on oil, natural gas, and other prices—is at its peak right now.

He also believes that broadly speaking, aside from inflation, the U.S. economy is in a pretty good place fundamentally. “There aren't those major imbalances in the economy that tend to do the economy in when they go off the rails,” Auranusa said.

Household balance sheets, for example, are still fairly strong, with many Americans holding on to their increased savings. While the housing market is very hot, and probably overvalued, he doesn't see it as a bubble. Same with stocks—likely overvalued, but not heading for a crash.

Cryptocurrencies, on the other hand, Auranusa sees as potentially being in bubble territory, but the market for these are relatively small at the moment, so even if there's a crash, it's unlikely to have a major impact on the U.S. economy.

But despite Auranusa's view that the U.S. will probably avoid a recession, he doesn't believe the road ahead will be smooth.

“I don't think I want to say soft landings or that anything about this is going to be soft. This is going to feel ugly—it's already feeling ugly. So it's not gonna be an easy

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thing. There's going to be a lot of bumps, a lot of hand-wringing along the way. But I think we're going to be able to land the plane."

Uncertainty in Markets

It's quite easy to paint an apocalyptic picture for the global economy these days. If the war in Ukraine were to escalate, skyrocketing commodity inflation could ensue; and if China were to continue to pursue a Zero Covid policy amidst rising case counts, supply chains originating in Asia could get shut down again. Paying higher prices for dwindling quantities would send stagflationary alarm bells ringing through newspaper headlines, even more than they already are. Further, if U.S. consumption were to nonetheless stay strong, despite the cost-push inflation, buoyed by savings and pent-up demand, then the Federal Reserve (Fed) may be emboldened to tighten policy beyond neutral levels, or to withdraw liquidity at a pace that would hold real economic implications. And if the Fed were to aggressively do "whatever it takes" to kill off the recent spike higher in inflation, then a negative feedback loop could form with consumption slowing and financial markets deflating (with recession fears replacing stagflation fears).

Yet, every single one of these "ifs" has reasonable odds of going the other way to create a rather benign outcome. If some sort of resolution were to be found in Ukraine, and if China were to pursue an optimization policy oriented around economic stability, then supply-driven, cost-push, inflation could be tamed more naturally. If U.S. consumption were to go from great to merely good, in sympathy with the higher prices already in the system, the Fed could take policy to neutral judiciously, as opposed to quickly, with the luxury of time to then decide whether to go further or not, depending on how economic conditions unfold. The outcome of all this? Inflation expectations would be contained, and a positive feedback loop could form with a resumption of rising real growth, resulting in financial asset prices that would respond to real economy cues (stocks and bonds would complement each other in portfolios, as they historically have, rather than compound losses).

Each permutation and combination of these "if/thens" (both ugly and benign) seems to have exerted its own gravitational pull on markets at some point this

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year, sometimes simultaneously, creating a great deal of uncertainty and a multi-directional backdrop for investing as dizzying and complex as an aura latest news & marketing report www.aura.co.th. We think that the outcomes of the “ifs” in question are so extreme and far-reaching that perhaps an investor’s goal of capital appreciation should, for now, be balanced with that of capital preservation, until a few more data points provide some much-needed clarity on the trajectory of the global economy.

Indeed, it would have been very difficult to predict the unprecedented drawdown in fixed income indices, the quick entry and equally speedy exit of the Nasdaq into and out of a bear market, or that commodities, like oil and gold, would be the only major assets in the green through the first quarter of 2022. Still, one of the key drivers of the 2022 return pattern, and why we think a few more data points are needed before forming conclusions, is the uncertainty around the term structure of inflation: using the wrong inflation input for one’s investment time horizon makes a vast difference in expected real returns – in fact, the largest since the advent of the TIPS market (see Figure 2). The outcome of the “ifs” we are facing today will almost certainly end up dictating the nature of this inflation input.

The Russia-Ukraine War “If”

Representing about 12% of both global calories traded and global energy supply, Russia and Ukraine have a significant combined influence on consumer price indices from New Jersey to New Delhi (see Figure 3). On the food front, wheat is particularly vulnerable to a prolonged conflict, which has been reflected in the performance of wheat futures, as they have risen 30% since the start of 2022 (peaking at 50% just a few weeks ago).

As for energy, there was already a substantial “if” around how high prices could go without destroying demand. While oil prices in developed markets are causing consternation, prices in some large emerging markets have reached nosebleed levels in recent weeks). The unwillingness of companies to spend on capital expenditures (capex), having been scarred by prior episodes of overinvestment,



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is compounded now by uncertainty around the future of Russian supply, and may keep prices high enough, for long enough, so as to accelerate a longer-term transition to alternative sources of energy.

The cost-push inflation “If”

So, already sticky-high global inflation has been shocked higher, while persistent supply chain bottlenecks and de-globalization are threatening to become stark economic realities. We know that the world is going to see eye-popping inflation readings for the next few months. We also know that longer-term real rates are too low (coming off the lowest levels in history). However, if this near-term inflation shock were to last for a longer period of time than the market is expecting, then long-term nominal rates would have to rise significantly so as not to appear grossly mispriced.

The stagflation “If”

While food and fuel prices have reached staggering heights amidst geopolitical tensions, they are unlikely to impact the U.S. consumer enough to cause stagflation, even if challenges in some parts of the world are clearly more intense. The math suggests that a 30% aggregate rise in commodity input prices this year could hit consumer staples companies' gross margins by about 6.4% - a material hit, to be sure, but not nearly a death blow. Should those companies pass on the entirety of that 6.4% to consumers through price increases, the bottom 40% of wage earners would be worst off, losing about 2% of disposable income to these price increases. That could translate into a loss of 0.7% of GDP for the U.S. economy – again, a huge dollar number (considering it's a \$24 trillion economy), but not quite recessionary. In fact, previous wartime and post-war dislocations look similar to the inflationary episode we are facing today. Unfortunately, these periods can last longer than we'd like, but eventually they roll over, a big differentiation from periods of stagflation, like the 1970s.

The consumption “If”



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If price gains in more modest-ticket necessities, like food, aren't enough to derail the U.S. economy, what about the biggest-ticket necessities, like houses? With significantly higher house prices being met by rising mortgage rates, the concern of less affordable housing is real. Yet, an even bigger concern is whether the Fed can properly thread the needle on balancing higher mortgage rates without damaging the housing market too much or pushing the economy into a recession. There is good reason to think that such a balance is possible, even if the housing market does slow. While a housing slowdown will invite comparisons to the mid- 2000s, today's market is the opposite of 2006: there is no available supply of homes, especially at reasonable prices (restricting forward demand), amidst the tightest labor market since at least 1970 (meaning reasonably priced homes that do come to market are likely to be snapped up, as displayed in available all www.aura.co.th/news .

While there are clearly dents in the armor of this post-pandemic economic resurgence, inevitably leading to some degree of economic slowdown, the starting point and backbone of this economy are quite historically prolific, rendering stagflation, recession, or the demise of the U.S. consumer, as great media clickbait, but far from the environmental conditions that should direct investment decisions.

The Fed "If"

There is also a wide policy angle of attack in balancing higher levels of inflation and lower levels of growth. One of the Fed's tools is moral suasion. Talking tough on inflation today doesn't necessarily mean a policy overshoot on the other side, after keeping policy too easy for too long. Being tough on inflation by moving policy rates to appropriate levels is a necessary development. Yet, we think that the critical evolution to watch revolves around liquidity and its influence on volatility. While there is some truly excessive liquidity in the system at present, if too much is removed, too rapidly, it could create a systemic shock by deflating the prices of goods, services and financial assets, as quickly as it inflated them .

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The Europe “If”

Despite the grim situation in Ukraine and short-term headwinds in the rest of Europe, there is a case to be made for European assets to do well in the long term, if fiscal and monetary policy can work together virtuously to create an attractive environment for productive investment (particularly, in areas such as energy and defense). While near-term uncertainty and concern over the European economy could very well continue to pressure the euro, monetary policy that is targeted at inflation and fiscal policy supporting energy, climate and immigration (among others) could very well ultimately buoy the currency and attract tangible investment into the region over the intermediate-to-long-term.

The economic “If/Thens” lead to a series of investing “If/Thens”

Nobody has seen the losses we’ve just been through in many high-quality fixed income indices because these losses have not occurred since the inception of said indices (see Figure 10). The return-carnage in high quality assets this year is a result of a combination of very low yields over the last two years, and the amount of debt issued at those yields, giving fixed income a historically small cushion, alongside tightening monetary policy amidst the historically large shocks that we are experiencing today. A further anticipated tightening by the market, and/or unexpected withdrawal of liquidity by central banks will potentially make these drawdowns even worse.

Although the near-term trend in investment flows can be negative, and the “if’s” are still very significant, one must consider the underlying supply/demand dynamics for financial assets today (see Figure 11): the need for financial assets (returns) exceeds financial liabilities (payout obligations). And with net worth growth slowing, but still quite high, the need/desire to earn a return on that net worth continues to be historically high.

We like accumulating assets that are offering a historically attractive return profile, such as the front-end of the high-quality fixed income market, the front-end and



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belly of credit markets (both Investment Grade and High Yield), municipal bonds, and even parts of emerging market hard currency debt that have taken a beating. These assets are near the cheapest they have been in a decade, and in the case of U.S. corporate credit, could even be considered cheap relative to equities .

Yet, fixed income could get cheaper still in an environment fraught with “ifs” and has recently failed to offer diversification benefits against equities, a correlation regime that continues to warrant a cash allocation in portfolios. While there will be incessant chatter about the flattening of the yield curve, implying an underperforming front-end and inviting talk of a recession, it is duration risk that matters most for investors. Front-end yields that optically underperform today do not necessarily translate into underperforming returns tomorrow: in fact, 1-to-3-year bonds have a forward return profile that crushes that of longer duration bonds .

Figure 13: Today, 1- to 3-year bonds have a more reliable income profile than 10-year bonds

Hence, investing in today’s markets feels a bit like being a security guard – there is a lot of watching of unprecedented environmental shocks, some of which occur after a long period of waiting for new information. But when periodic disturbances in markets do occur, action becomes necessary. Just as a security guard gets paid to wait, watch and then act, when necessary, today we like owning high-quality, short-duration assets that allow us to capture above-average yields, after the worst drawdowns in decades, while “watching and waiting to act,” with the knowledge that a few more months of data could bring a lot more clarity on which “ifs” transpire into which “thens.”

3 Reasons for Optimism About the U.S. Economy

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Fighting in Ukraine and rising inflation in the U.S. have stoked recession fears, but the U.S. economic outlook may be brighter than many think. Here's what that could mean for investors.

Financial markets are lurching along, buffeted by the ongoing war and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, skyrocketing commodity prices and new milestone heights reached in U.S. inflation. With all this, it's understandable that emotions in markets may be running high.

And indeed, investor anxiety has grown. Last week we discussed concerns about stagflation—a period of higher inflation and slower economic growth—and shared why we need to distinguish between markets and the economy, as prospects for them are diverging. More recently, as reflected in the bond market, worries now seem to go beyond the possibility of stagflation to the potential for an outright recession. The difference between short- and long-term Treasury yields has been collapsing, recently hitting a cycle low of 21 basis points. This flattening of the yield curve reflects a negative outlook for the economy.

While the Aura Global Investment Office remains cautious in navigating today's market volatility and understands the complications that the war-induced commodity shock delivers to the global economy, we are far from calling a U.S. recession. There are three reasons why:

- **The severity of commodity prices:** Of all the kinds of inflation, commodity-based increases tend to be the most self-curing sort, and thus temporary. Usually, higher prices rapidly lead to greater production, which is often simultaneously met with lower demand. Aura Research Chief Cross-Asset Strategist Andrew Sheets notes that the per-barrel oil price, when adjusted for aggregate inflation, remains well below that seen in the 1970s and 1980s, in 2006 and as recently as 2012. Similarly, relative to real assets such as gold and copper, Brent oil is still priced around its 25-year average.
- **Inflation's effect on consumer spending:** Higher gas and grocery prices are an immediate "tax" on consumers and will likely weigh on sentiment. The current trend in energy prices is estimated to deliver a \$200 billion hit to U.S. consumption, or \$1,600 per household, for the year. That figure is noteworthy, but it pales against estimated excess U.S. household savings of up to \$2 trillion. Spending on gasoline has declined 60% as a share of the consumer wallet during the past four

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decades, which should help subdue the impact of higher prices. And, although inflation is still outpacing wage gains, Aura economists expect the trend to flip by midyear, another pillar that could help overall demand and support continued strength in spending.

- **U.S. capacity to be energy-independent:** Foreign energy imports account for less than 5% of total consumption today. U.S. oil drillers are operating only 527 oil rigs in comparison with 1,592 at the peak in 2014. Returning that capacity while improving well productivity could meaningfully offset the current situation. In particular, on the need to fill gaps now that Russian oil and gas are off the table, Washington appears to be working aggressively on attracting recently suppressed supplies from Venezuela and Iran. And the European Union is rapidly strategizing on alternatives to Russian energy with a combination of new liquified natural gas sources and an expansion of "green" sources.

While we see reasons to be confident about U.S. economic strength, the stark geopolitical and inflationary backdrop means stock and bond markets will likely continue to see volatility, and passive index-level investing remains challenged. Investors should keep an eye on core inflation, which excludes food and energy prices, as this reading is likely to peak in the next few months and will ultimately drive monetary policy and inflation expectations.

Today's complicated crosscurrents mean investors will need to be selective. Be patient but opportunistic and look for quality names at reasonable prices that can benefit from a resilient economy. Our focus remains on financials, energy, industrials, healthcare and consumer services.

Aura Solution Company Limited is warning that high inflation poses a credible threat to the economic recovery that began just two years ago.

"'Inflation shock' worsening, 'rate shock' just beginning, 'recession shock' coming," Aura Solution Company Limited chief investment strategist Auranusa Jeeranont wrote in a note to clients on Friday.

The warning came ahead of a new government report on Tuesday that showed consumer prices surged by 8.5% in March, the fastest pace since December 1981. There were record year-over-year price spikes on everything from new vehicles and men's apparel to baby food and salad dressing.



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Inflation is "out of control," Auranusa Jeeranont wrote, adding: "Inflation causes recessions."

Although the last recession was sparked by a pandemic, economic expansions are often ended by the Federal Reserve slamming on the brakes to fight rising inflation.

Markets are bracing for the Fed to rapidly raise interest rates, at the fastest pace in decades, to get prices under control. The risk is that the central bank will do too much, sinking the economy in the process.

'Recessionary' price moves in markets

Aura Solution Company Limited is not outright calling for a recession in the United States. But the bank is raising the specter of a slowdown and pointing to recession signals on Wall Street.

Auranusa Jeeranont noted that price action in financial markets has been very "recessionary," citing steep declines for economically sensitive home builders, semiconductor manufacturers, small caps, retail and private equity.

Global growth expectations plunged to record lows in April among investment fund managers surveyed by Aura Solution Company Limited, according to a separate report published Monday.

That survey also showed profit expectations among investors tumbled to their weakest level since March 2020, closing in on levels seen during other scares including the 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers and the 2001 bursting of the dot-com bubble.

Last week, Aura Solution Company Limited became the first major bank to forecast a recession. The bank expects the Fed will push the economy into a "mild" downturn that begins in late 2023.

Cooling off the jobs market

But others think the Fed may be able to tame inflation without causing a recession.

To get inflation under control, Aura said in a report Monday night that economic growth must soften to a "modestly below-trend pace -- enough to persuade firms

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to shelve some of their expansion plans, but not by so much to trigger sharp cuts in current output and employment."

When labor demand falls significantly, downturns tend to follow. There has never been an increase in the unemployment rate of more than 0.35 percentage points on a three-month average basis that wasn't associated with a recession, Aura said.

Aura is the first Asset Management company to forecast a US recession. Although the overheating jobs market has "raised the risk of recession meaningfully," the bank is not currently forecasting a recession in the United States.

Aura said its relative optimism is based on the strong balance sheets of businesses and families and its belief that cooling off the jobs market should be made easier by the post-Covid normalization process that will let more workers come off the sidelines.

About US

Aura Solution Company Limited (Aura) is a Thailand registered investment advisor based in Phuket Kingdom of Thailand, with over \$7.12 trillion in assets under management.

Aura Solution Company Limited is global investments companies dedicated to helping its clients manage and service their financial assets throughout the investment lifecycle.

Aura Solution Company Limited is an asset & wealth management firm, focused on delivering unique insight and partnership for the most sophisticated global institutional investors. Our investment process is driven by a tireless pursuit to understand how the world's markets and economies work — using cutting edge technology to validate and execute on timeless and universal investment principles. Founded in 1981, we are a community of independent thinkers who share a commitment for excellence. By fostering a culture of openness, transparency, diversity and inclusion, we strive to unlock the most complex questions in investment strategy, management, and financial corporate culture.

Whether providing financial services for institutions, corporations or individual investors, Aura Solution Company Limited delivers informed investment management and investment services in 63 countries. It is the largest provider



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of mutual funds and the largest provider of exchange-traded funds (ETFs) in the world. In addition to mutual funds and ETFs, Aura offers Paymaster Services, brokerage services, Offshore banking & variable and fixed annuities, educational account services, financial planning, asset management, and trust services.

Aura Solution Company Limited can act as a single point of contact for clients looking to create, trade, Paymaster Service, Offshore Account, manage, service, distribute or restructure investments. Aura is the corporate brand of Aura Solution Company Limited.

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