

Operational Planning for Conflict Termination

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the United States Naval War College Newport, RI in satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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14. ABSTRACT Throughout its 244-year history, the United States has struggled with terminating conflicts, leading to prolonged hostilities and muddled diplomatic situations. In order to overcome these historic shortfalls, Joint Task Force (JTF) commanders should look to create a Specialized Operational Planning Team for Termination (SOPT-T). This SOPT-T would improve how JTF commanders cleanly and permanently terminate conflicts at the operational level of war. To effectively conduct operational-level planning for conflict termination, the JTF commander should ensure that the SOPT-T consists of members from all applicable joint functions (combines arms), available intergovernmental agencies, and select international partners. This paper outlines the historical and doctrinal limitations of interagency planning as it relates to conflict termination. Next, it argues that SOPT-Ts must consist of military officers from a diverse array of functional backgrounds and nationalities as well as talented interagency contributors. Finally, this paper provides a blueprint for future termination planning at the operational level consisting of 15 to 20 experts from the three specified categories. The goal is to provide a standard design for future operational leaders who must develop planning teams tasked with effectively terminating future conflicts.					
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Abstract

Throughout its 244-year history, the United States has struggled with terminating conflicts, leading to prolonged hostilities and muddled diplomatic situations. In order to overcome these historic shortfalls, Joint Task Force (JTF) commanders should look to create a Specialized Operational Planning Team for Termination (SOPT-T). This SOPT-T would improve how JTF commanders cleanly and permanently terminate conflicts at the operational level of war. *To effectively conduct operational-level planning for conflict termination, the JTF commander should ensure that the SOPT-T consists of members from all applicable joint functions (combined arms), all available intergovernmental agencies, and select international partners.* This paper outlines the historical and doctrinal limitations of interagency planning as it relates to conflict termination. Next, it argues that SOPT-Ts must consist of military officers from a diverse array of functional backgrounds and nationalities as well as talented interagency contributors. Finally, this paper provides a blueprint for future termination planning at the operational level consisting of 15 to 20 experts from the three specified categories. The goal is to provide a standard design for future operational leaders who must develop planning teams tasked with effectively terminating future conflicts.

Throughout its 244-year history, the United States has struggled with terminating conflicts, leading to prolonged hostilities and muddled diplomatic situations. To address these concerns, from 2009-2013, the Department of Defense and the Department of State underwent a doctrinal overhaul. This overhaul resulted in multiple publications that stressed the importance of joint, interagency, and multinational synchronization towards successful conflict resolution.¹ While current joint doctrine emphasizes the importance of joint, multinational, and interagency planning, it does not provide a construct to achieve this synergy at the operational level of war. Building on this doctrinal baseline, Joint Task Force (JTF) commanders should create a Specialized Operational Planning Team for Termination (SOPT-T) to improve how they cleanly and permanently terminate conflicts. *To effectively conduct operational-level planning for conflict termination, the JTF commander should ensure that the SOPT-T consists of members from all applicable joint functions (combined arms), all available intergovernmental agencies, and select international partners.*

First, this paper will outline the historical and doctrinal limitations of interagency planning as it relates to conflict termination. Next, it will argue that SOPT-Ts must consist of military officers from a diverse array of functional backgrounds and nationalities as well as talented interagency contributors. Finally, the paper puts forth a blueprint for future termination planning at the operational level consisting of 15 to 20 experts from the three specified categories. The goal is to provide a standard design for future operational leaders who must develop planning teams tasked with effectively terminating future conflicts.

¹ Beth Cole and Emily Hsu, "Guiding Principles for Stability and Reconstruction: Introducing a Roadmap for Peace," *Military Review* 90, no. 1 (2010), 3.

Background

To avoid historical mishaps and apply the lessons learned from the United States' most recent experience in conflict termination – Iraq in 2013 – commanders in charge of joint task forces should plan for conflict termination from the onset of hostilities. Clausewitz reminds us that “no one starts a war...without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war,” yet JTF commanders have continued to muddle through the conflict termination process.² In the recent past, conflict termination has been an afterthought, planned for by Functional Area (FA) 59 strategists and School for Advanced Military Studies graduates. These planners resided within the Joint Force Strategic Plans and Policy Division (J-5) section of the JTF commander's staff.³ While this framework succeeded in Iraq, it may not in current and future conflicts. Through the first four phases of the OPLAN – Deter, Seize the Initiative, Dominate, and Stabilize – the planning responsibility should continue to reside within the J-5 and the Strategy and Plans staff. However, once the conflict has reached the final phase, Enable Civil Authority, the planning responsibility should shift to the J-3 Operations directorate. Once this transition occurs, the joint force commander should create a focused SOPT-T of hand-selected, talented professionals, malleable to the requirements for successful conflict termination at the operational level.

The SOPT-T would focus on the technical aspects of conflict termination: security requirements, troop withdrawal, enabler allocation, equipment drawdown, and base closure.⁴ In addition to its technical focus, the SOPT-T must be adequately prioritized, manned, and have a

² Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 92.

³ Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Senior Leaders Guide to Transition Planning*, (Combined Arms Center: May 2013), 18.

⁴ CALL, *Guide to Transition Planning*, 1-2.

shared understanding of the commander's military and political objectives. Currently, the individuals assigned the task of conflict termination planning – strategists from the J-5/7 – lack the diversity, capability, and capacity required to be successful in this endeavor. In order to effectively plan for conflict termination, the JTF commander should maximize the flexibility afforded by joint doctrine to construct a SOPT-T, instead of using a more structured and officious alternative.

This paper offers a SOPT-T planning construct that a joint force commander can use even in the most complex of environments; for instance, the one now faced in Afghanistan. Conflict termination, as used throughout this paper, is defined as the formal end of fighting when both belligerents have suspended the use of military force as a coercive method to achieve the desired political end state.⁵ Conflict termination is not to be confused with broader themes of conflict resolution or war termination, which continue after the cessation of formalized hostilities. This paper focuses on the importance of operational-level planning and the execution of the tasks associated with terminating the conflict and is tailored to address JTF commanders tasked by Combatant Commanders to end armed conflict in a given theater.

Lack of Operational Focus

Even in the most decisive of military victories, the United States military has struggled to terminate conflicts effectively. Operations Just Cause, Desert Storm, and Iraqi Freedom all represent clear military successes, marred by post-conflict transitional struggles. In each of these examples, JTF commanders encountered issues because they struggled to fully leverage the instruments of national power: Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME) in conflict termination. A failure to achieve synergy across all elements of national power leaves

⁵ William Flavin, "Planning for Conflict Termination and Post-Conflict Success," *Parameters* 33, no. 3 (Autumn 2003), 96.

even the strongest nation susceptible to defeat.⁶ By failing to bring all the available assets to bear against the enemy, a belligerent weakens its position at the negotiating table. This failure often results in a diminishment of returns when conflicts end, regardless of success on the battlefield. The United States' historic inability to fully leverage DIME instruments stems from the lack of early termination planning and disunity of effort in the whole government approach.⁷ Had the leaders responsible for conflict termination planning employed the right specialized team – one that combines arms, and has multinational and interagency members – at the decisive point (Phase V: Enable Civil Authority) success would have followed.

Beginning in 2003, DOD and DOS professionals identified these deficiencies and examined ways to address these at the strategic level. To emphasize the importance of interagency and multinational planning, scholars published articles, refined doctrine, and modified the professional education curriculum. However, this doctrine provided a strategic framework and institutional background instead of an actionable, operational construct. Nevertheless, the result of this overhaul manifested itself in a successful intergovernmental effort to terminate Operation New Dawn.⁸ The transfer of authority and withdrawal of military forces from Iraq in 2011 was a U.S. success and one that was done with honor. “Success and honor” in the termination of Operation New Dawn was a result of four years of coordinated USG and multinational efforts.⁹ Despite the strategic lessons learned from Iraq 2009-2013, doctrine did not capture an operational blueprint for success. Where doctrine and scholarly publications agree on the necessity for a joint, interagency, and multinational process, they fail to provide an

⁶ Jeff Farlin, “Instruments of National Power: How America Earned Independence,” 2.

⁷ Flavin, “Planning for Conflict Termination,” 96-97.

⁸ Cole and Hsu, “Guiding Principles for Stability and Reconstruction,” 1-2.

⁹ Richard Brennan et al., *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq: The Final Transition, Operational Maneuver, and Disestablishment of United States Forces-Iraq*, (Santa Monica: RAND, 2013), 24.

example of how to integrate these entities at the operational level of war during conflict termination. This leaves the JTF Commander with no planning construct to successfully terminate conflicts at their specific level of war.

DOD and DOS publications continue to speak of the necessity of joint and interagency planning. Still, they fall short of providing guidelines to ensure that joint force commanders have the right stakeholders on the operational planning team. The Center for Army Lessons Learned published a *Senior Leaders Guide to Transition Planning* warning JTF commanders to include as many agencies and nations as possible throughout the planning process.¹⁰ Yet, this guide merely mentions the necessity of integration and falls short of specifying who or how. The DOS's *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction* also acknowledges the need for conflict termination to be an interagency process, but it speaks in broader, more theoretical terms. *Guiding Principles* focuses more on the strategy of executing conflict termination versus how to perform the operational planning. It suggests that civil-military integration requires “specific forms of cooperation,” yet it too provides no clear forum for specific cooperation at the operational level.¹¹

Joint doctrine attempts to fill these gaps by providing options. JP 5-0, *Joint Planning*, offers several means for JTF commanders to facilitate interagency planning. First, JP 5-0 provides that an “Interagency Coordination Annex,” also known as Annex V, to “integrate interagency input and concerns into the joint plan.”¹² While this annex allows JTF commanders to integrate interagency input into the OPLAN, it requires a formal Operations Order (OPORD)

¹⁰ CALL, *Guide to Transition Planning*, 43.

¹¹ U.S. Institute of Peace and U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction* (October 2009), 3-19.

¹² Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operational Planning*, final coordination, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0 (Washington, DC: CJCS August 2011), I-17.

publication and a robust and formalized planning process. While US Forces in Iraq were able to publish OPOD 11-01 in 2011, this may not be the blueprint for success in a future conflict.¹³ For example, in Afghanistan, US forces are faced with a conditions-based withdrawal tied to a negotiated settlement, complicated further by vital national security priorities, a special representative peace envoy, and contested presidential elections.¹⁴

In Afghanistan, it would be virtually impossible to completely commit the military and diplomatic staffs to the planning of conflict termination and withdrawal. While doctrinal elements have made noteworthy progress in identifying the necessity of a joint, interagency, and multinational process for all planning, it fails to magnify the importance of this cooperation with relation to conflict termination. Doctrine also provides JTF commanders with tools that they may find useful, like Annex V, senior development advisors (SDA), political advisors (POLAD), Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) [or equivalent], and the defense attaché (DATT). Still, it ultimately leaves the commander to his own devices to determine how to integrate for conflict termination planning.

In addition to vague guidance, the current group charged with conflict termination planning does not meet the three requirements of being a combined arms, interagency, and multinational team. The current framework fails to manage talent adequately, ensure mutual trust, and in some cases, creates additional bureaucratic establishments. An example of a possibly restrictive and bureaucratic entity is the JIACG – or equivalent organization, like a Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF). The JIACG is designed for integration at the theater-strategic and combatant commander level, where the staffs are well-established, and the focus is regional.

¹³ Brennan et al., *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq*, 82.

¹⁴ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, January 30, 2020, I.

The JIACG could provide a starting point for the new OPT but is incapable of taking the primacy of planning during Phase V (Enable Civil Authority) because it lacks the technical subject matter expertise. Therefore, the JTF commander should take advantage of the flexibility afforded by joint doctrine to appoint the right personnel, as long as the team consists of combined arms, interagency, and multinational experts.

Right team, right time: Maximize the flexibility afforded by doctrine

Because doctrine lacks a formal construct at the operational level, the JTF commander should look to build a team of his choosing with the necessary experts. To effectively plan for conflict termination, this team must combine arms and have active interagency and multinational contributions. In creating such a diverse array of talented planners, the JTF commander should take advantage of the flexibility afforded by joint doctrine – the ability to create unique planning cells that can direct planning efforts across the staff – to establish a SOPT-T focused on successful conflict termination in Phase V, Enable Civil Authority.¹⁵

When entering the decisive phase of conflict termination, the JTF commander should no longer rely on the previously established planning groups. Instead, he should ensure that the right team is in place with a precise focus on conflict termination. The *Senior Leaders Guide to Transition Planning* offers that this responsibility should fall to the Joint Force Strategic Plans and Policy Division (J-5).¹⁶ It goes on to note that the available J-5 team may not have the diverse array of skills necessary and provides multiple courses of action to augment the J-5 staff, the “Tiger” and “Relief” teams.¹⁷ The *Tiger* team assigned to the J-5 with the task of planning conflict termination should consist of subject matter experts, from “as many agencies, partners,

¹⁵ Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operational Planning*, final coordination, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0 (Washington, DC: CJCS August 2011), 18.

¹⁶ CALL, *Guide to Transition Planning*, 19.

¹⁷ CALL, *Guide to Transition Planning*, 19.

and supporting units as possible.”¹⁸ This is an excellent start and one that can maintain continuity in planning conflict termination throughout the first four phases of joint operations. However, once the conflict enters Phase V, Enable Civil Authority, the commander of joint forces should transition the responsibility for the final planning and execution of conflict termination to the J-3. This transition did not occur in recent historical examples like Iraq in 2011, but it must happen for two reasons: the planning horizon would now fall within the current operational planning window, which belongs to the J-3, and because the J-3 is in a better position to man the SOPT-T with the required personnel. The J-3 would then reevaluate the members of the SOPT-T and restructure the team to fit the operational requirements. The flexibility afforded by the SOPT-T structure would allow the J-3 to prioritize the personnel necessary for operational execution instead of future strategic planning.

With the JTF commander’s oversight and direct involvement, the J-3 must build a combined and joint planning team, capable of operational planning for conflict termination. During Phase V, the SOPT-T must be able to plan for equipment drawdown, base transition, enduring sites, future force posture, operational requirements, and redeployment, among other key planning challenges.¹⁹ To accomplish these tasks, the SOPT-T should have representation from all necessary joint functions – Command and Control, Information, Intelligence, Fires, Maneuver, Protection, and Sustainment – and by doing so, the team would effectively combine arms.²⁰ The SOPT-T must have expert logisticians, engineers, intelligence officers, maneuver officers, SOF representatives, and aviators. These specialists are necessary due to the technical nature of conflict termination in Phase V. Engineer planners would understand the assets needed

¹⁸ CALL, *Guide to Transition Planning*, 18.

¹⁹ CALL, *Guide to Transition Planning*, 51-52.

²⁰ Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Operations*, final coordination, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 (Washington, DC: CJCS January 2017), III-1.

for base reduction. SOF planners would provide expertise on the footprint required for security operations considered vital to national security interests. Air load planners would be able to work with the uplift force provider to ensure the availability of necessary aircraft for equipment and personnel retrograde. Each one of these experts would be able to plan and coordinate independently. They could host or provide input into the various working groups necessary to conduct withdrawals. The SOPT-T would become the one-stop-shop for all questions about conflict termination.

In addition to combining arms, the SOPT-T must also understand all the instruments of national power. While much of the interagency and intergovernmental cooperation will occur at a higher level, the OPT should be able to account for these instruments unilaterally. Therefore, the OPT should have a liaison cell consisting of the U.S. and multinational government planners at the JTF-level.²¹ As an example, the DOS planners could provide insight into reconstruction efforts, economic policy, political issues, and public communications.²² Each interagency partner would bring a unique set of skills and insight into their organizations, planning factors, and ideas on termination. The establishment of this unique and focused SOPT-T during Phase V would allow for each of these intergovernmental agencies to adequately prioritize whom they send as liaisons. The assumption is that the shifting of responsibility from the DOD to DOS will incentivize the importance of collaboration. By not using a standardized and permanent hierarchical structure, interagency contributors can look to send their most talented individuals at the most decisive time of the transition.

Multinational contribution is also a necessity of the SOPT-T. The SOPT-T liaisons must represent as many national members of the combined team as possible. The Host Nation, Allies,

²¹ Interview with a major from the Afghanistan Operational Planning Team, 30 March 2020.

²² Brennan et al., *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq*, 46.

and Coalition members all must have some form of representation. These professionals must be able to answer requests for information and bring multinational issues to the attention of the OPT. Due to the compartmentalization of information and certain caveats, planners may struggle in physically integrating these members. But the JTF commander should sufficiently emphasize the importance of this face-to-face interaction and ensure international contribution. A way to accomplish this effort is by conducting a parallel planning process. In this case, the SOPT-T liaisons become the perfect OPT leads for their nation. By creating habitual and trusting relationships, the SOPT-T can share distributable material, receive input, and pass along pertinent information to each partner. The SOPT-T liaison structure allows for multinational contribution to the development of conflict termination plans by providing coalition members with buy into the termination plan.²³

By following these three guidelines when constructing a SOPT-T focused on conflict termination at the operational level, JTF commanders will have a team that can effectively leverage the elements of national and international power. Doctrine has made significant strides in creating a collaborative environment, but it is ultimately up to the JTF commander to turn this theory into reality. The JTF commander should capitalize on the ability to create a SOPT-T to ensure that they have the right people at the right time, focused on conflict termination. Through utilizing the OPT framework to build a team of experts across the joint, governmental, and international organizations available, the JTF commander will ensure successful conflict termination.

²³ Interview with a major from the Afghanistan Operational Planning Team, 30 March 2020.

Counter-Argument: COCOM JIACG or equivalent

Some may argue that the solution to this problem already exists. They would say that JTF commanders should utilize the Joint Inter-Agency Coordination Group (JIACG) at the Combatant Commander level and that this fusion cell should reside with the COCOM J-5. They would point at the lessons learned from Iraq in 2011 as an example of effective conflict termination planning.²⁴ To those who would argue for the JIACG, it would serve as an interagency staff group that “establishes regular, timely, and collaborative working relationships between civilian and military operational planners.”²⁵ Through consistent interaction and familiarity, the JIACG would be a fusion cell capable of conflict termination planning.

While this construct makes sense for well-established unified combatant command staffs that look at broader national strategic objectives, this construct is too restrictive for future operational-level joint force commanders tasked with termination execution. In these cases, the JTF commanders would be limited to the personnel within the JIACG hierarchy for planning. There is no guarantee that despite its best intentions, the JIACG would not become another staff entity manned by transitional strategist planners, without any specific oversight into the capability of each of its members. The JIACG would not combine arms, nor would it have multinational representation. Instead, it would rely on working groups and additional interactions and synchronization meetings to develop comprehensive plans because it lacks the subject matter expertise resident within its own team of planners. This USG fusion cell would be beneficial in maintaining the pulse of the conflict termination plan in the early phases of notional joint operations. Still, it would fall woefully short in its abilities to take a conceptual conflict

²⁴ Christopher V. Moylan, “War Termination Planning for Operations DESERT STORM and Iraqi Freedom,” Thesis, Naval War College, 2018, 1.

²⁵ Joint Innovation and Experimentation Directorate, *Commander’s Handbook for the Joint Interagency Coordination Group*, United States Joint Forces Command: 1 March 2007, I-5.

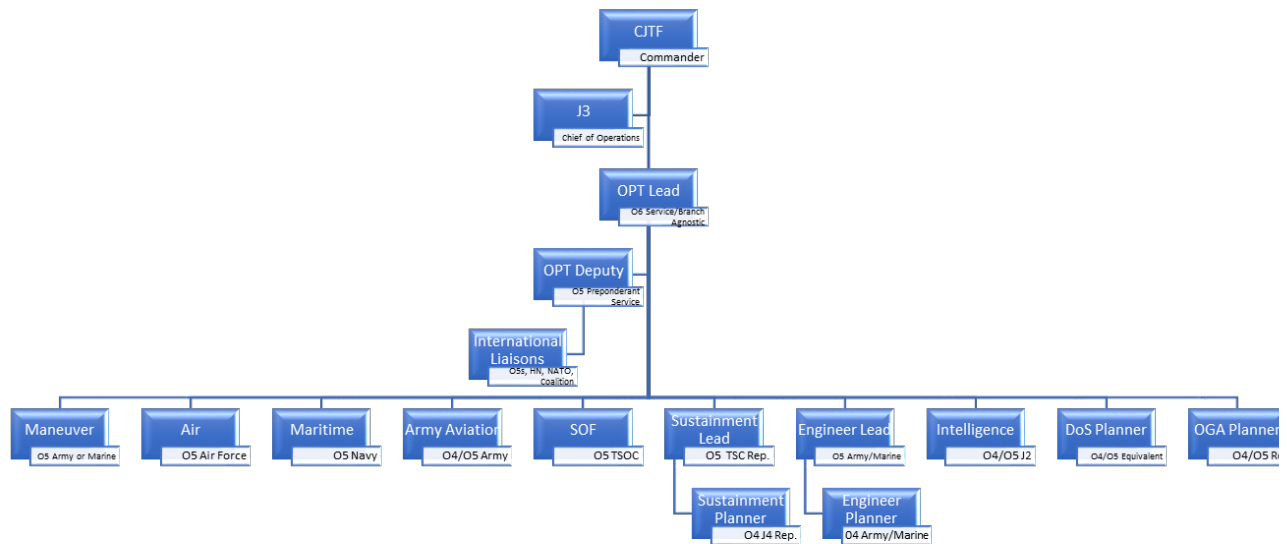
termination plan into operational execution. When conflict termination comes to the forefront in Phase V, Enable Civil Authority, the JTF commander could be caught looking to an antiquated establishment, resident for as long as the conflict has been underway, that lacks combined arms and interagency experts.

Conclusion and Recommendation [See figures below]:

To accomplish the synergy, cooperation, and focus required to plan for conflict termination successfully, the SOPT-T should consist of members with joint functional expertise, from all applicable intergovernmental agencies, and select international partners. By using the malleable SOPT-T construct, the JTF commander can ensure the right personnel are available at the decisive point in conflict termination. The recommendations below look to serve as a starting point, not a perfect solution, for a JTF commander when looking to construct a planning team focused on conflict termination.

1. The OPT should answer directly to the JTF commander and receive direct guidance upon creation. The JTF commander should provide the OPT with the military objectives and the desired political end state.
2. CJTF should delegate direct oversight of the OPT to the J-3 during the fifth phase of joint operations, Enable Civil Authority.
3. The J-3 should then construct a joint, interagency, and multinational OPT. This OPT should consist of an OPT lead, deputy, maneuver planner, air planner, army aviation planner, SOF planner, intelligence planner, sustainment planner, engineer planner, interagency liaisons, and multinational liaisons.²⁶

²⁶ Interview with a major from the Afghanistan Operational Planning Team, 30 March 2020.



Title	Rank	Service/Agency/Branch	Notes
OPT Lead	O6	Service/Branch Agnostic	Selected by the CJTF
Deputy OPT Lead	O5	Of the preponderant service command	Maintains direct oversight over the liaison cells
Maneuver Planner	O5	Army or Marine/IN or A.R.	
Air Planner	O5	Air Force	Air mobility pilot is preferential
R/W Aviation Planner	O4/O5	Army or Marine	Should come from the supporting CAB
SOF Planner	O5	Service Agnostic	Insert from the TSOC
Sustainment Planners	O5 and O4	Service Agnostic/LG	TSC and J4 representatives
Engineer Planners	O5 and O4	Service Agnostic/EN	
Intelligence Planner	O5 or O4	Service Agnostic/MI	J2 representative
Interagency Liaison(s)	O4/5 or Equivalent	DOS/CIA/USAID	Can be military liaisons, though not preferred
International Liaisons	O5 Equivalent	Allies and Host Nation	Level of participation and integration will differ based on caveats and compartmentalization

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