

INTRODUCTION TO CHINA'S MILITARY OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR

Policy Report

February 2019

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Executive Summary

With its increasing capability witnessed in recent decades, the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) conduct of military operations other than war (MOOTW) remains woefully understudied. With most analyses concurring it improbable that Beijing would engage in traditional security operations in the foreseeable future, responses to non-traditional security (NTS) threats would appear to be an aspect where the PLA's capabilities will continue to be showcased. In reviewing China's MOOTW, this policy report provides a retrospective account of how the PLA has overseen previous MOOTW activities, as well as identify those areas of PLA MOOTW expected to undergo further refinement. A better appreciation of NTS and China's MOOTW will provide a positive platform for facilitating cooperation between Beijing and other countries in the region.

Introduction

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been undergoing a sea change since late 2015. Cognizant of the previous shortcomings in its leadership, training, and operational capabilities, the armed wing of China's Communist Party (CCP) has ventured into uncharted territory and has been subjected to wholesale changes to its organisation, force structure, and operations. Notwithstanding its growing capabilities alongside China's maritime assertiveness in the South China Sea,¹ it is more probable in the foreseeable future, however, that the PLA's activities shall remain limited to deterrence as well as military operations short of war.²

Due to greater interest in traditional security generally, the PLA's capacity for military operations other than war (MOOTW), unsurprisingly, is an oft-neglected area of study. Considering it is that aspect of Chinese military power which is tested more regularly given the number of non-traditional security (NTS) threats that have occurred in recent decades, the dearth of literature on the PLA's conduct of MOOTW is disappointing. While it may be better-known for its guerrilla tactics during its revolutionary Long March and, following the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), conventional warfare in the Korean War, and its border disputes with India and Vietnam; the Chinese military has conducted different forms of warfare since its inception.³ Following from Beijing's successful economic development via Reform and Opening-up, enhancements have been made to the PLA's capacity for maintaining social stability, providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), international peacekeeping, and international humanitarian aid.

Drawing from official Chinese research, this policy report will introduce to a wider audience an overview of the principles of PLA MOOTW and its practice – with

¹ One recent analysis went as far as stating that Beijing would be able to challenge Washington "throughout the entire Indo-Pacific region" by 2035, if not before; see "2018 Annual Report to Congress." U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, November 2018. www.uscc.gov/Annual_Reports/2018-annual-report.

² According to one former Taiwanese defence official, "[...] I'm 100 per cent sure that the PLA will not be waging any war, no matter whether it's in the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait." *South China Morning Post*, January 1, 2019. www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/2180309/chinas-military-priorities-2019-boost-training-and-prepare-war.

³ The three missions first espoused by Mao Zedong, "wiping out the enemy in a war", "toppling landlords to raise money", and "doing mass work" were later codified in 1929. Indeed, Mao, noted the PLA was a combat team perpetually, but simultaneously also a "work team"-cum-"production team"; see Yang Zhongmin, "The Historical Development and Practice of the Thinking of the People's Liberation Army's Combat Team, Work Team and Propaganda Team". www.wenku.baidu.com/view/5384c3a7c77da26925c5b059?pu.

two objectives in mind. First, it will review how the PLA had organised its forces in previous instances of MOOTW in the post-Reform era. Second, following the recent PLA reforms, it seeks to identify those areas of MOOTW that are likely to undergo more qualitative changes. In the current context of the PLA's evolving force structure, a retrospective appreciation of PLA MOOTW – its achievements and limitations – can serve to illuminate other larger “black boxes” in our understanding of the PLA's transformation and Chinese defence strategy. Moreover, a better appreciation will also help inform our prognostication of Beijing's potential responses to likely NTS threats in the near future – both within China, and without.

Development of China's MOOTW

MOOTW are those operations undertaken by military forces to safeguard their country's national security and developmental interests, that do not constitute a war. These include counter-terrorism and stability maintenance, HADR operations, the safeguarding of sovereignty and national interests, safety and security operations, international peacekeeping, and international rescue and relief.⁴

Although the PLA has conducted MOOTW since its inception, it was not until 2006 that it began to use the term “MOOTW”. That year, PLA organisations including the Academy of Military Science (AMS), the National Defense University (NDU), and the Army Command College (ACC) began to study its concepts, leading to the present situation where the PLA has formulated its own MOOTW theories. First, legal documents for MOOTW were established, and complemented with manuals including the *Doctrine for Preventing Riots, Regulations to Participate in Disaster Rescue and Relief, Regulations in Joint Peacekeeping Operations, Financial Support for MOOTW, and Outlines for MOOTW Capability Development*. Second, theoretical works were also drafted. Alongside a series of eight books on the subject published by the ACC in 2008 to systematically explore various issues in MOOTW, PLA researchers also contributed a large volume of literature including *Introduction to Military Operations Other Than War, Studies on Counter-Terrorism Operations, Disaster Rescue and Relief, and International Peacekeeping Operations*.⁵

⁴ “People's Liberation Army's Military Terms.” AMS Press, 2011, 163.

⁵ Another important title is Zheng Shouhua (ed.). “A Course in Military Operations Other Than War.” AMS Press, 2013.

Operations-wise, an Emergency Office was established in the former General Staff Department (GSD) in 2010 to take charge of the organisation and conduct of MOOTW. This was complemented by the setting up of leading departments and academic organisations within the PLA, including *ad hoc* MOOTW research centres within the AMS and NDU. Teaching and research offices were also established in a number of PLA colleges such as the ACC and the Shijiazhuang Mechanized Infantry College to conduct research and education on NTS threats, develop MOOTW theories, and provide consultations for China's key civil and military decision makers.⁶

Classification of China's MOOTW

Regarding the classification of MOOTW, three viewpoints exist within the PLA. The first, mostly held by professors at the NDU, adopts a 12-type classification system: deterrence, counter-terrorism, riot suppression, mass event management, border blockade, disaster rescue and relief, nuclear, biological and chemical rescue and relief, air and sea security, air and sea control, protection of maritime strategic communication lines, international peacekeeping, and overseas rescue and relief.

A second viewpoint more popular among researchers and active-duty personnel at various PLA headquarters categorises MOOTW into 6 types: counter-terrorism and stability maintenance, HADR, operations to safeguard sovereignty and national interests, safety and security, international peacekeeping, and international rescue and relief. The *People's Liberation Army's Military Terms* (2011 edition) adopts this 6-type MOOTW classification.

A third viewpoint predominant in the AMS assumes a 7-type classification: counter-terrorism, stability maintenance, disaster rescue and relief, operations to safeguard sovereignty and national interests, safety and security operations, international peacekeeping, and overseas rescue and relief. Given the principal author's previous affiliation, a brief introduction to this categorisation is discussed (see **Figure 1**). In all of the following, PLA MOOTW directives require approval from the CCP Central Committee and the Central Military Commission (CMC).⁷

⁶ The latter included leaders from the then GSD, General Political Department, General Logistics Department, and General Armaments Department (GAD).

⁷ While emphasising the CCP's leadership, the directives take into account civilian-military coordination.

1. Disaster rescue and relief

Disaster rescue and relief operations are directed to save lives, and reduce casualties and property losses during serious natural disasters and public emergencies. In 1998, when floods hit the Yangtze, Songhuajiang and Nenjiang Rivers, 300,000 PLA soldiers were called to the scene. In early 2008, when a snowstorm lashed China's southern provinces,⁸ 100,000 personnel from the PLA and the People's Armed Police (PAP) were deployed to provide relief. In May 2008, when an earthquake measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale struck Sichuan's Wenchuan County, 150,000 PLA and PAP troops were dispatched the same day to conduct search and rescue, and provide medical assistance.⁹

2. Counter-terrorism

Counter-terrorism aims to prevent and negate terrorist activities in close coordination with the PAP and China's public security forces, under the unified leadership of local Party committees and governments. During the 1990 Baren township riot in Akto County in Xinjiang, the PLA and PAP combined with local public security forces and militiamen to quell the insurgency. Further highlighting the civil-military approach, China's Supreme People's Procuratorate, Supreme People's Court, Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of Justice recently issued *Guidelines on Legal Issues in Dealing with Terrorist and Extremist Criminal Cases*.¹⁰

3. Stability maintenance

This seeks to maintain social order through the enforcement of martial law and the suppression of mass protests in cooperation with the PAP and China's public security forces. In response to riots in Tibet on 14 March 2008, more than 130,000 PLA and PAP personnel carried out stability maintenance operations across 59 counties in Tibet, as well as in Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan provinces.

4. Safeguarding sovereignty and national interests

Safeguarding sovereignty and national interests across land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace, as well as the protection of the Chinese people's overseas rights and

⁸ These include Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Anhui, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan.

⁹ When the Army Armament Scientific Research and Procurement Department realised search and rescue operations were hampered by a lack of search and breaking-in tools, 120 sets of multi-function pincers, dicing saws and other breaking-in tools were quickly procured before they were delivered to the frontline – all within 21 hours – a record in the GAD's history in the procurement of, and distribution of equipment, to the frontline.

¹⁰ "The four departments issued guidance on handling terrorist and extremist crimes in accordance with the law." Xinhuanet, June 15, 2018. www.xinhuanet.com/legal/2018-06/15/c_1122993559.htm.

interests come under the PLA's purview. Between December 2008 and August 2018, China sent 30 naval escort task forces to Somalia in the international anti-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden.¹¹ More recently, Beijing also conducted mass evacuations of Chinese and foreign nationals from Libya and Yemen.¹²

5. Safety and security operations

This comprises safety protection and crisis response measures to ensure that important public activities proceed safely. During the 2008 Olympic Games, former CCP general secretary and CMC chairman, Hu Jintao, tasked 310,000 PLA personnel (from 123 units above regiment-level) with safety and security missions to ensure the Games' success. In all, security operations; raids to counter potential nuclear, biological and chemical attacks; as well as medical support were facilitated across seven competition areas in Beijing and Tianjin.

6. International peacekeeping

This is conducted either singly by the PLA or in conjunction with the armed forces of other countries at the request of the host country or local government with authorisation from the United Nations (UN).¹³ China began to participate in UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO) in 1988 before sending peacekeepers to undertake inaugural missions in 1989. In 1992, Beijing formally organised its first "Blue Helmet" troops – an engineering corps – in Cambodia. In 1997, the PLA joined the UN "on-call peacekeeping arrangement" and until April 2018, has deployed more than 30,000 personnel in 24 UNPKO missions. On 25 May 2009, China's Ministry of National Defence set up its Peacekeeping Centre – the first establishment of its kind in China – in Huairou, Beijing to facilitate international exchanges and training.

7. International rescue and relief

International rescue and relief operations are offered to countries affected by natural or man-made crises – at the request of the host nation, or the UN. In October 2005, the China International Search and Rescue Team comprising 49 earthquake experts, PLA engineers, and PAP medical workers travelled to Pakistan with search dogs, professional equipment, and relief material. As the first overseas unit to arrive at the worst-hit Balakot area, the team treated more than 590 casualties and succeeded in rescuing seven survivors.

¹¹ "PLA Navy ends era of 'supply-ship troika' in its escort mission." China Military Online. www.eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-08/09/content_9247256.htm.

¹² "China evacuates foreign nationals from Yemen in unprecedented move." Reuters, 3 April, 2015.

¹³ New legislation passed allows the use of force against terrorists outside Chinese borders, with the consent of the relevant nations and CMC approval; "PRC counter-terrorism law." *PLA Daily*, 28 December, 2015.

Principles of China's MOOTW

At home and abroad, PLA MOOTW observes the following principles in its missions.

1. Acting according to laws and regulations

With legitimacy being an important consideration, MOOTW are to be carried out in accordance with laws and regulations. When executed within China, domestic laws and regulations should be followed. When implemented overseas, international laws and regulations of the host nation(s) are to be abided by.¹⁴ Overall, force should be used within legal limits; the legal rights of targets of operations are to be observed; and the operational area is also to be controlled and managed accordingly.

2. Rapid response and deployment

Earthquakes, fires, terrorist attacks, as well as incidents involving nuclear, biological and chemical attacks occur spontaneously. The slower the response time, the greater the losses – with the implication that spill-on effects may occur. Therefore, when assigned a MOOTW task, the PLA is expected to organise a force without delay, deploy rapidly to the mission area as fast as possible, and begin rescue and relief work *immediately*. To that end, it strives towards advance planning and being fully prepared – psychologically and materially. Likely scenarios covering a range of potential missions are enacted beforehand, during which effective decision-making and rapid, efficient execution is encouraged.

3. Joint command to unify efforts

In dealing with grave disasters or violent emergencies, MOOTW very often calls for joint efforts between the CCP, local authorities, the PLA, and other civilian actors. A temporary local command must be established for unified leadership to shoulder joint responsibility so as to bring all kinds of functions in tandem. In that regard, the PLA is required to adopt a holistic consideration of any contingency, with a key component of its operations being its subordination to local governments. Depending on conditions on the ground, one of three possible types of MOOTW command systems may be established (see Figure 2).

¹⁴ MOOTW are intertwined with politics, economics, diplomacy, religion and culture, and concerned with the national interests and the public perceptions of a government and its armed forces. Any action or personal behaviour taken against the laws, regulations and cultures of a country would therefore result in the intensification of contradictions and the escalation of security threats.

4. Effective organisation and civil-military coordination

The backup afforded to MOOTW directly determines success or failure.¹⁵

Therefore, persons-in-charge of organising operations are expected to exercise efficacy in mobilising all relevant personnel, making considered plans, reviewing existing conditions, and creating conditions to meet all support requirements.

To achieve this, command and control of operations is exercised carefully.

During operations, close military-civilian coordination is realised through a set of protocols entailing either the central or local authorities assigning MOOTW tasks, as well as marshalling the resources and support required for the tasks.¹⁶

5. Managing publicity and boosting morale

It is common for MOOTW to come under public scrutiny. Positive media coverage about PLA MOOTW, thus, not only boosts morale but also inspires personnel to carry out their tasks well. Prompt dissemination and exchange of information is recommended to enhance troops' capacity; while timely news conferences are encouraged to promote situational awareness among the public, with comprehensive media coverage also employed to showcase PLA work style.

6. Adhering to United Nations principles

When participating in international peacekeeping operations, PLA troops observe the tenets of legality, consent, neutrality, and the least use of force stipulated under UNPKO. Indeed, Chinese peacekeepers are organised with UN Security Council authorisation (under the auspices of the UN Assembly) and commanded by UN-authorized commanders. Operations are governed by international laws and customs agreed upon by all parties in a conflict, with PLA troops maintaining neutrality and refraining from the host country's internal affairs. Use of force in peacekeeping activities is strictly forbidden except in self-defence.

¹⁵ Support for PLA MOOTW includes the provision of political, logistical, equipment, and operational support. Of the latter, these include intelligence and information, communications, electromagnetic, weather, survey, and navigation.

¹⁶ In most instances, civilians play a principal role with the PLA executing its missions under the former's guidance.

Conclusion

The PLA began to augment its MOOTW theory just as the US military discontinued the use of the term in 2006.¹⁷ Although its doctrine had to some extent been influenced by the United States, PLA MOOTW is marked by inherently Chinese characteristics. First, its theorisation spans a longer history.¹⁸ Second, its categorisation of operations differs from its American counterpart: the US version comprises 18 types, including arms control and disarmament, enforcement of sanctions, enforcing exclusion zones, support for insurgencies, counter-insurgency, strikes and raids – all of which the PLA excludes. Third, the PLA emphasises the importance of political work in MOOTW, whereas the United States does not.

With peace and development being the order of the day, it is probable the PLA will continue to see action in MOOTW. Looking ahead, operations may be expanded to cover arms control and disarmament, and the enforcement of exclusion zones among others. Also, PLA MOOTW theorisation will likely be augmented to adapt to new situations. Lastly, following from the recent reforms, some PLA units are likely to be restructured.¹⁹ The wide range of contingencies means that multifarious professional skills – some of which go beyond the traditional capabilities of a regular army – may be called upon. Thus, the PLA and other militaries need to be equipped with new skills to cope with future challenges, so as to seize those momentary windows of opportunity during crises. The need for cooperation with civilian bodies (including national agencies, non-governmental organisations, and private volunteer groups) also means that the military professional overseeing MOOTW may have to contend with issues unfamiliar to a soldier.

With over 90 years of practical experience and more than a decade of theoretical development, PLA MOOTW has progressed tremendously. First, MOOTW

¹⁷ Notwithstanding that MOOTW theory was enhanced in the 2001 edition of JP3-0, “Doctrine for Joint Operations,” 29 key changes were made in the new edition of JP3-0, “Joint Operations” (September 2006), including discontinuing the use of the term ‘MOOTW’.

¹⁸ Although MOOTW in the US dates to the 19th century, its armed forces only established the theory in its warfighting doctrines in the 1990s. For instance, the US Army devoted an entire chapter to explicate the theory in the 1993 edition of FM100-5 Operations. In 1995, JP3-07, “Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War” expounded on the concept further.

¹⁹ Following the reorganisation, PLA MOOTW involving foreign countries is undertaken by the CMC Office for International Military Cooperation with support from the CMC Joint Staff Department (JSD). Within Chinese borders, MOOTW is overseen by the JSD, with the relevant CMC organ(s) providing support.

theorisation has become systematised and comprehensive, with the PLA now possessing an extensive set of doctrines, regulations, and standard operating procedures to guide its operations. Second, MOOTW has become well-integrated in PLA training and education, and its operational capabilities have also greatly improved. Third, it has expanded from covering mass work and production activities to include search and rescue, HADR, social stability maintenance, counter-terrorism, and safety and security operations. As China's national interests become more global, MOOTW has expanded to include international rescue and relief, and UNPKO. Given that NTS threats are a common problem faced by all members of the international community, a greater appreciation of Chinese military activities in this regard will serve as a useful platform to recognise future avenues for cooperation with the PLA, and contribute in building confidence between Beijing and countries in the region.

Figure 1

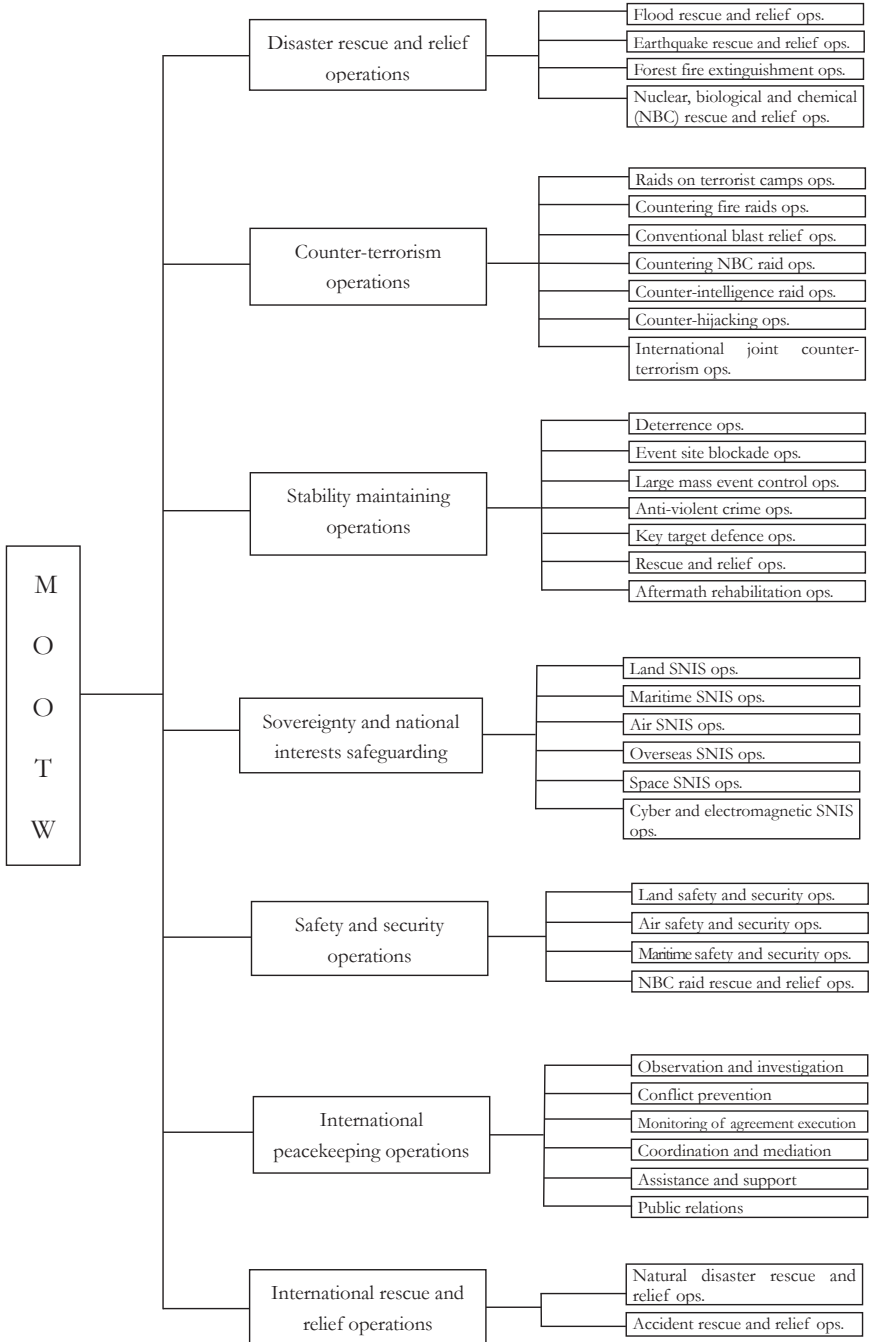


Figure 2

| Levels of Command* | Command Organisations | Examples in Practice |
|------------------------|---|--|
| 4-Level Command System | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CMC + Relevant CMC Organs 2. Regional/ Service Command 3. Area of Responsibility (AOR) Command 4. Mission Force Command | <p>During search and rescue operations in the aftermath of the Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan province, such a command system was established, i.e.,:</p> <p><i>PLA Earthquake Relief Command</i> → <i>Chengdu Military Region Joint HQ</i> → <i>AOR Command</i> → <i>Missions Troops Command</i></p> |
| 3-Level Command System | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CMC + Relevant CMC Organs 2. Regional/ Service Command 3. Mission Force Command | <p>This 3-level command system was established during the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008.</p> |
| 2-Level Command System | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CMC + Relevant CMC Organs 2. Mission Force Command | <p>In October 2007, the CMC decided to compress the layers of command by ordering the former GSD Operations Command to directly marshal the Fujian provincial command to swiftly launch search and rescue operations in the aftermath of heavy floods which had struck Fujian, in a bid to implement an efficient 2-level command.</p> |

* For the purpose of establishing effective command, the national-level emergency response command comprised personnel from the former General Departments. Provincial-level command is manned by officers from the provincial command or the relevant group army. At the level of the municipality/county, command may draw on personnel from the local military sub-area (garrison) and the local PAP department. In special cases, theatre commands may also deploy commanding officers to the provincial emergency response command. If there are multi-level and different services within the same AOR, the highest-ranked commander on the ground becomes one of the members of the local emergency response command.

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The **Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS)** is a key research component of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS). It focuses on defence and security research to serve national needs. IDSS faculty and research staff conducts both academic and policy-oriented research on security-related issues and developments affecting Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific. IDSS is divided into three research clusters: (i) The Asia Pacific cluster – comprising the China, South Asia, United States, and Regional Security Architecture programmes; (ii) The Malay Archipelago cluster – comprising the Indonesia and Malaysia programmes; and (iii) The Military and Security cluster – comprising the Military Transformations, Maritime Security, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) programmes. Finally, the Military Studies Programme, the wing that provides military education, is also a part of IDSS.

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