

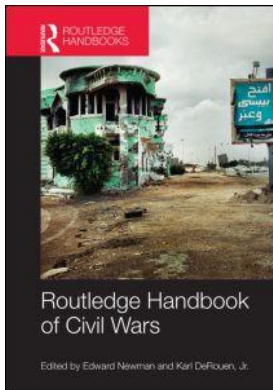
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THE DURATION AND RECURRENCE OF CIVIL WAR

Karl DeRouen, Jr.

In addition to onset and outcome – topics covered in Part II and in Kreutz’s chapter respectively – civil war duration is an important line of inquiry because every day the war continues there is additional suffering. Similarly, civil war recurrence signals a harrowing return to the devastation at a time when many thought the war to have subsided. The costs of war include death, displacement, disease, child soldiers, sexual abuses, stalled economic growth, and numerous secondary outcomes that flow from these effects. While civil war duration varies widely, there are some patterns and explanations that can help us understand this range. Duration can be explained by war type, the availability of lootable natural resources, third-party military intervention, mediation, and spoilers, among other factors. To make matters worse, once wars end, they can easily reignite. Recurrence is a function of several factors including how the war ended, the presence of lootable resources, the nature of the state (capacity, level of democracy) at war’s end, costs of the war, mediation, and war type. This chapter explores the determinants of civil war duration and recurrence of civil war by looking at key findings in the literature.

Duration

Numbers from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Conflict Termination Project¹ (Kreutz 2010) reveal the average length of civil wars episodes from 1946 to 2009 is approximately 1647 days (note that approximately 34 wars were still ongoing as of December 31, 2009). However, war length varies a great deal. For example, there have been multiple military coups in Paraguay and Ghana that lasted only one day. The Karen National Union, on the other hand, has been fighting a secessionist war against the government of Myanmar since 1948. Whereas some long wars have low fatality rates, they can still lead to human displacement, the spread of disease, and economic disruptions over time and thus cannot be downplayed. Below, the key determinants of civil war duration are discussed in turn.

War type and credible commitment

There are essentially two types of civil war: secessionist/territorial, and wars over control of government. Coups are a sub-class of civil wars over control of government. These two war types occur with roughly the same frequency. Of the 341 civil wars identified in the Uppsala

Conflict Termination data, 158 were over territory and 179 were over control of government (see Kreutz 2010). While their distribution is similar, when it comes to duration, secessionist wars and wars over government differ in several important ways.

Fearon (2004) links war type to civil war duration. Coups and revolutions seek quick outright victories. Failing this, coup organizers will likely face imprisonment, death, or exile. The strategy in territorial wars – which are usually fought on the periphery – is to continue the fight to win more concessions at the bargaining table. Peripheral wars do not necessarily need outright military victory to realize important goals. Rebels in these wars have more time.

Coup organizers, on the other hand, typically do not recruit and organize rebel armies ready and willing to engage the government army in a drawn-out war. Coups are staged by members of the government (often the military) who set out to quickly take the reins of power. This is not to say that coups cannot be followed by new coups carried out by different individuals. There were approximately 30 military coups between 1946 and 2009 identified in the Uppsala Conflict Termination data (see Kreutz 2010).

Peripheral/territorial wars tend to endure and are unlikely to end conclusively with peace agreements or military victories. According to the Uppsala Conflict Termination data, the mean duration of territorial wars from 1946 to 2010 is 1826.7 days (see also Kreutz 2010). Fearon (2004) reasons that a lack of credible commitment on the part of the government leads the rebels not to trust any sort of autonomy deal the government might offer. In other words, the rebels do not see the government as a credible negotiation partner. The rebels predict the government will renege or not follow through on any commitment it makes. When the rebels are doing well militarily relative to the government the latter will offer generous concessions such as autonomy or laws that give special consideration to the rebels. However the rebels will expect the government to break these promises as the rebel advantages dwindle.

The government would prefer outright military victory to concessions on autonomy but it is difficult for the government to end a territorial war militarily as the peripheral group can use the terrain to its advantage and can blend into the civilian population. In addition, because the rebels do not threaten to take over the central government (their goal is independence or autonomy), the government does not feel compelled to pay the high economic and political costs an overwhelming military victory would require (Fearon 2004). Another obstacle for the government is ethnic rebels operating on the periphery often use guerrilla tactics. Examples of these peripheral secessionist wars include several of the wars in Myanmar and the Aceh war in Indonesia. These conflicts are sometimes called “sons of the soil” wars. Fearon also notes that rebel access to contraband resources will further prolong these wars.

Wars over control of government, on the other hand, typically do not last as long (Fearon 2004). Wars designed to take central government usually involve a large, well-organized rebel army if they are to have a chance at victory. In these wars the stakes are high because the central government is directly threatened. The government is likely to go all-out to defeat the rebels as quickly as possible. Subsequently, on average, these wars are shorter. Using UCDDP Conflict Termination data again we find that the mean duration of these wars is 1456.7 days between 1946 and 2010. There are exceptions to this rule as the war between FARC and the government of Colombia has waged since 1965 in part because the rebels have enriched themselves through drug profits.

Third-party intervention

Third-party intervention in civil war is usually designed to help one side win and end the fighting. Subsequently the expectation is that intervention should reduce the duration of civil

wars. However, Balch-Lindsay and Enterline (2000) report when third-party intervention is distributed equitably between the disputants during the period 1820 to 1992, the war is more likely to stalemate. For example, the civil war in Angola was quite long as Cuba intervened on behalf of the government and South Africa fought for the rebels. The Cold War superpowers also gave economic support to their respective proxies. However the authors report military intervention against the government reduces duration.

A different argument is made by Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000) who report that external interventions often make civil wars longer because they make it easier for rebels to organize and carry out the fighting for a given level of ethnic polarization. High levels of ethnic diversity are thought to make it easier for ethnic rebels to recruit and organize within their group. In more homogeneous societies in which rebels cannot count on ethnic loyalties the government is better able to break up rebel networks. However, Elbadawi and Sambanis show that even in lower levels of ethnic polarization, an external intervention on behalf of the rebels makes it easier for the rebels logistically by lowering the costs of organizing and recruiting. The result is a longer war as the rebels can more effectively remain viable.

Regan (2002), however, in a subsequent study that focuses on post-World War II, reports that interventions that favor one side can help reduce duration. However, interventions that attract opposing interventions reduce the probability the war will end in the next month. Finally, he reports that economic and military interventions drag the conflict out longer.

Studies of intervention require us to consider the possibility of selection effects. In other words, are some wars more likely to draw intervention than others? It is feasible to consider that third parties are more likely to intervene in “easy” cases in which victory seems likely. On the other hand, potential third parties might go into the messier situations to help bring the bloodshed to an end. If there is a bias – i.e. if third parties are more likely to systematically choose hard or easy scenarios – empirical results could be misleading if selection effects are not taken into account. If a third party is systematically choosing hard cases, the results without selection could imply the third party is not very effective when in reality this conclusion is misleading because the party is mainly or only dealing with the cases less likely to lead to success. The reverse case is also possible. If a third party is “cherry picking” the easy cases we could be led to overestimate its success rate. DeRouen (2003) uses a selection model to reveal the UN tends to select the nastier international crises in which to get involved. Only after this selection is taken into account can the true effectiveness of the UN involvement be observed.

Lootable resources

The illegal exploitation of resources (sometimes called contraband, black market goods, or lootable goods) can provide finances to rebels that can be used to pay for food, weapons, recruits, or miscellaneous supplies. The economist Paul Collier (see Collier and Hoeffler 2004) argues that profiting from these lootable goods can prolong war. This is an effective method for rebels because the sale of lootables does not rely on legitimate markets that would otherwise not allow rebels to profit. They prolong the war both because rebels are making money to pay for their operations and because in some cases they are making a profit.

Diamonds are an especially useful form of contraband possessing a high value-to-weight ratio. Until recently diamonds were fairly easy to sell on the black market. Some forms of alluvial diamonds require very little capital investment as rebels can just wade through rivers and scoop up sediment in their search for diamonds. Diamonds were successfully exploited by UNITA rebels in Angola after the Cold War ended and the US and South Africa withdrew their support. The international community cracked down on this mechanism through the so-called Kimberley

(because talks began in Kimberley, South Africa in 2000) Process that makes it harder to sell conflict diamonds.

Drugs and black market timber are other forms of lootable goods. The previously mentioned use of drugs by FARC rebels in Colombia and timber by various rebels in Myanmar are prime examples here. The sale of drugs by rebels requires a certain amount of secure territory stable enough to host the processing of the goods. The exploitation of black marker timber requires only a few trucks and chainsaws. Each of these commodities has extended wars.

It is important to note that while lootable goods play a key role in duration, they are not as clearly linked to the onset of the war. One possible exception is that the war in Aceh can be partially traced back to grievances linked to large natural gas deposits in the region. The local population felt ownership of the resource on “their” land and was not satisfied about sharing the revenue with the rest of the country.

Lootable contraband might also shorten wars in certain instances. Weinstein (2005) observes that contraband resources in rebel areas could undermine the recruitment of dedicated rebels. This is because rebels drawn to contraband-fueled wars might only be interested in short-term financial gain and not the wider cause. When contraband is lacking, these short-sighted opportunists stay away and more dedicated fighters are recruited.

Spoilers and veto players

Stephen Stedman (2000) identified another factor that can prolong war: the presence of spoilers both inside and outside a peace process. He defines spoilers as parties who see the peace process as a threat to their power or worldview. As a result, spoilers will turn to violence to derail the peace process. Acts of violence during a peace process will understandably generate obstacles to a successful outcome. Spoilers use violence to undermine peace processes because the nature of the peace being negotiated may threaten their power or interests (Stedman 1997). This may also help explain why mediation sometimes leads to increases in rebel terrorism. Mediation takes place during peace talks or leads to peace talks which in turn can lead to spoilers who perceive peace as detrimental to their interests. The result is a longer war. The Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA) was a spoiler group unhappy with the Northern Ireland peace process. They broke away from the Provisional IRA after it signed a ceasefire in 1997. Not wanting a compromise solution with the British, the RIRA carried out a bombing in Omagh in 1998 that killed 29 and injured over 200. Veto players are actors with the ability to affect policy because their approval is required for a desired outcome. In effect they have the ability to block decisions. For example, veto players are often key players in ruling coalitions in parliamentary systems. David Cunningham (2006) demonstrates veto players can sometimes exist in negotiations. These veto players can lengthen the war because it will be harder to find a mutually acceptable solution. Also there will be information problems as some actors have more or better information than others.

Recurrence

Recurrence is related to duration as a war that stops and starts frequently over time is likely to have the same deleterious effects as one long war. Often wars end only to start up again a few years later. The war fought between the MFDC rebels of the Casamance region and the government of Senegal recurred four times after the first episode in 1990. Recurrence can be defined as the renewal of fighting after a period of peace. The factors listed below each affect the probability of recurrence.

War type

Whereas several scholars note that ethnic/secessionist wars are more intractable than wars over government, there is not a wealth of empirical evidence directly linking war type to recurrence. One exception is Wucherpennig (2008) who theorizes the probability of recurrence goes up in secessionist wars. Prior wars, he argues, lock in the positions of each side. After a war episode the ethnic rebel's view of their cause as legitimate gets stronger and the government position as unwilling to compromise is cemented.

Ideology can be shed or changed and rebels can accordingly modify their demands to the point where a negotiated settlement is an acceptable outcome. This implies that negotiated settlements in ideological wars over control of government might be expected to be more stable over time. In territorial conflicts – many of which have an ethnic component – demands cannot so readily be shed or modified. In other words there is less room for compromise. As mentioned, ethnic wars fought on the periphery often have significant credible commitment issues. The rebels do not trust the government to live up to the concessions made during negotiation. In short, these conflicts are more likely to recur as the government reneges on the terms of the agreement. This is why third-party involvement in the peace process is crucial. A third party such as the UN can provide security guarantees that can compensate for the lack of credible commitment on the part of government.

Others find no clear evidence of a connection between war type and recurrence. For example, Quinn *et al.* (2007) find war type not to be an important determinant of recurrence. Using different data, DeRouen *et al.* (2012) similarly show that increases in life expectancy reduces the probability of recurrence across war types.

Outcome of the previous war

Wars typically terminate with a peace agreement, a ceasefire, military victory, or sometimes with no apparent or specific event marking the end. According to the Uppsala Conflict Termination data (see Kreutz 2010), from 1946 to 2009 43 wars ended with peace agreements, 32 ended with a ceasefire, 98 ended with military victory by rebels or government, and 122 fit into the “other” category. The rest were ongoing as of December 31, 2009.

DeRouen and Bercovitch (2008) modeled the duration of peace after civil war. This is inherently the same as modeling the recurrence of civil war because if the peace ends, the implication is that the war has recurred. They find military victories tend to make peace more enduring because one side is completely vanquished as a fighting force (DeRouen and Bercovitch 2008). In interstate wars, on the other hand, the losing side typically maintains its own military. According to Quinn *et al.* (2007), however, civil wars are less likely to recur when rebels win or if there is a peace agreement accompanied by peacekeepers. It is important to note that these two studies used different data.

Walter (2004) diverges from the argument that the previous war's outcome is a critical explanation of recurrence. Instead she posits that opportunity costs as measured by quality of life and access to democratic institutions will shape the ability of the rebels to recruit. If the economy is growing and the country allows political participation, rebels will be less likely to join the fight.

Costs of war

The cost of war can be measured in terms of duration and deaths. Toft (2009) finds death rate and total deaths have opposite effects on recurrence. Total death reduces the probability while the average rate increases the probability of the war restarting. It is plausible that a high rate can be more closely linked to an urgent need to resolution.

In general, the costlier the war, the more likely it will be mediated. Greig (2005) reports this and Bercovitch and Gartner (2006) also find deadlier wars tend to attract the attention of mediators. In general, the prospects for mediation should increase with war duration.

As above, deaths and duration each represent a component of the costs of war. The question is whether high costs make recurrence more or less likely. Quinn *et al.* (2007) argue that war-related deaths should help the post-war peace because these deaths make recruiting more difficult by discouraging fighters and diminishing the recruiting pool. They also note that high casualty rates also cause each side to doubt its ability to win in any case of renewed fighting.

Walter (2004), however, suggests that high casualty rates could undermine the peace if the government indiscriminately kills great numbers of civilians as part of its retaliation against rebels; popular support for the insurgency may well grow, and the rebels might be more likely to start fighting again as they attract new and committed recruits. Toft (2009) also finds that death rates have a positive effect on recurrence probability.

The duration of the previous war, on the other hand, is expected to make recurrence less likely. Long wars should increase the chance of mediation and/or negotiated settlements as information is revealed to fighters pertaining to what they are likely to face if the war recurs and on the level of resolve of the other side (Quinn *et al.* 2007). Doyle and Sambanis (2000) also argue that longer wars result in battle fatigue. As a civil war endures, the probability of recurrence diminishes as the weaker side reaches a point where it knows it cannot prevail on the battlefield (Walter 2004). In other words, the longer the war, the more information will be available to each side in terms of the adversary's power and resolve. A long civil war might give some actors the opportunity to learn that they do not have sufficient resources to initiate another war.

The war's end begins a spell of peace. The duration of these spells after the war can help determine if a lasting peace will take hold. The duration of peace after a civil war has been shown to have a negative impact on recurrence (see DeRouen and Bercovitch 2008). In other words if peace has lasted 20 years after a war has ended, the probability of war in a future year is quite low. There was a civil war in Costa Rica in 1948 but the probability of this war recurring is virtually zero after some 65 years. On the other hand, the probability of a war recurring on two or three years after ending is higher as a stable peace might not have taken hold.

The duration of the war can also be considered a cost of war and as such has relevance for recurrence. If a long war has been fought and ended with government victory or negotiated settlement and the rebels are contemplating renewing the fight, the memory of the long war will be on their minds. The rebels will likely recall the costs and war-weariness from the long war that they did not win. On the whole, a long war should lower the probability of recurrence (see DeRouen and Bercovitch 2008). A note of caution is that many long wars are relatively low in intensity (rate of deaths) so the rebel cost of fighting is not exceptionally high. From this perspective, a long, low-intensity war might well recur after ending. Very long but low-intensity ethnic wars in Burma match this scenario.

On the whole, we expect that costliness lowers the probability of recurrence. This could be seen as a result of what Zartman (1989) calls a "mutually hurting stalemate." The longer and more deadly the previous civil war, the more stable the subsequent peace because belligerents value peace over the uncertainty of another long and/or deadly war.

Characteristics of the state at war's end

All things considered, democracy is expected to promote peaceful conflict management practices (see Greig 2005). Democratic regimes should be more able to establish the appropriate peace-building institutions. Democratic regimes are more amenable to peaceful resolution of disputes

(see DeRouen and Goldfinch 2005; Dixon 1994). Hartzell *et al.* (2001) find that democracy lengthens the duration of civil war negotiated settlements as these forms of government are best suited to accommodate competing interests and weaken the threat of defections.

The capacity of the state at war's end will also be an important determinant of recurrence. As mentioned, if the economy is robust it is harder to recruit rebels (Walter 2004). Higher levels of development could also signal greater chance for a peace agreement to obtain and thus a decreased chance of recurrence. DeRouen *et al.* (2010) provide case-study evidence that state capacity is a critical ingredient of peace agreement implementation. A state needs a certain amount of capacity to implement the peace. Such implementation often includes disarming and reintegrating former rebels, democratizing, holding elections, or establishing an independent judiciary. If the government lacks capacity to implement reforms, the rebels might grow impatient and renew fighting. Relatedly, DeRouen *et al.* report state capacity proxied as life expectancy at war's end has a negative impact on the probability of recurrence.

Quinn *et al.* (2007) also find that higher levels of development at war's end reduce the probability of recurrence. It is likely that greater state capacity raises the opportunity costs for rebels. In other words, rebels incur a cost by foregoing an economic opportunity that could well be offered in a prosperous state. This would be expected to undercut rebel recruitment and motivation to fight.

Lootable resources

A high proportion of lootable resources in a country's export sector is generally indicative of a state without the capacity to effectively control the resource(s). In other words the state may not have a monopoly of violence within its entire territory. There could be lawless areas controlled by rebels exploiting the resources. A classic example is the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The resources can be an exploitable resource for rebels contemplating renewing the fight. Taken together, they point to the conclusion that lootable resources make recurrence more likely. If the state cannot control the resources, it likely does not have a monopoly on the use of violence and does not effectively administer all of its territory. It also could mean an underdeveloped economy that offers little promise for unemployed former rebels. The promise of making profits from diamonds, gold, or illicit drugs could be enough to push the decision towards one of renewing the fight.

Peacekeeping operations and third-party intervention

Peacekeeping operations are specifically designed to make recurrence less likely. Specifically, peacekeepers typically take up positions between former combatants to lower the probability one side will take aggressive action against the other. Doyle and Sambanis (2000) report the virtues of peacekeeping as an enhancement for local capacity at war's end.

Some wars such as those in Lebanon and Cambodia experienced third-party military intervention. On one hand, these wars should be more likely to be mediated because of the complicating nature of third-party military involvement. This involvement provides a context that would draw in mediators. On the other hand, it could make the party on whose behalf the intervention occurs less likely to agree to mediation. If a powerful third party is intervening in a civil war on your behalf you may feel your chances improved to the point that you refuse to participate in mediation. During the Cold War the civil war in Angola was internationalized with the presence of South African and Cuban troops and significant aid from the superpowers. Mediation becomes less likely in such a situation as actors see their prospects enhanced by the presence of armed foreign allies.

Rebel recruitment

For a rebel movement to sustain itself to the extent needed to renew a war, it needs a renewable supply of recruits who are willing and capable. Walter's (2004) empirical results lead her to conclude that recruitment of rebels is a function of opportunity costs as measured by quality of life and access to political participation. If the economy is growing and there is some level of democracy it will be harder to recruit rebels. It stands to reason that if conditions during a war allow potential rebels to freely voice their opinions and/or have a reasonably good chance of finding work in the licit economy it will be harder for rebels to recruit for a renewed war. In short, the better the state is doing, the harder it is for rebels to recruit and the lower the probability of a recurrence.

Repeat wars and enduring rivalry

DeRouen *et al.* (2009) found that wars are less likely to recur after a second or third war. There are probably two dynamics at work here. First, it could be indicative of fatigue and learning effects. Each side realizes what it will face if war is restarted. Relatedly, there is evidence that repeat wars are less likely to be mediated (see DeRouen *et al.* 2011; DeRouen and Bercovitch 2011).

Long wars that defy negotiated settlements and military victory can be categorized as enduring internal rivalries (EIRs) which are basically long civil wars fought over the same issues for at least ten (not necessarily consecutive) years.

The "sons of the soil" argument (Fearon 2004) has relevance for EIRs as many of these wars are very long. In fact most, but not all, EIRs are secessionist-type wars that go on for years or even decades. The list includes Burma vs. Karen National Union, Indonesia vs. GAM in Aceh, and Papua New Guinea vs. Bougainville Resistance Army. Recall that credible commitment problems in these types of wars mean that negotiated settlements are hard to reach. EIRs are not simply long wars. DeRouen and Bercovitch (2008) provide evidence that the first peace spell in EIRs tends to be shorter than the first peace spell of non-EIRs. They argue this is evidence that these combatants "lock-in" their differences early.

Other factors

DeRouen and Wallenstein (2013) assess the efficacy of mediation in civil war across war types. They formulate a cost-based theoretical argument linked to casualties and differences in civil war types. They speculate the effects of mediation might not be consistent over time or across war types. War costs can potentially change the ability of mediation to bring about peace. As mentioned, territorial civil wars are generally more intractable and less costly in terms of death. Government wars, on the other hand, are more costly in terms of death and concern issues such as power-sharing, improving governance, constitutional change, and democratization.

Whereas mediation can address questions of low credible commitment in peripheral secessionist wars, if the costs of continued fighting are low, rebels are likely to persist. Low costs mean disputants will likely have high demands at the peace table. Such demands will mean mediators will either have to offer great incentives (rewards in the form of aid or recognition) or signal the ability to project high costs (i.e. pointing to the dangers of outside intervention) (see Crocker *et al.* 2004). Low costs essentially mean the disputants are not in a mutually hurting stalemate (Zartman 1989) that makes them ready to make a deal.

In territorial wars an outcome that results in the drawing of a new border is likely to be a permanent outcome that differs from, for example, a power-sharing agreement in a war over

control of government. Thus the authors hypothesize that mediation can potentially change the underlying power relationship between the disputants in a government war by helping disputants see the advantages of a power-sharing arrangement. The results of the statistical analysis support the hypothesis as mediation lowers the probability of recurrence of government wars but not territorial ones.

Relatedly, Fearon's (2004) "sons of the soil" model also has implications for recurrence. Recall that the model predicts the rebels will likely not perceive the government as a credible negotiating partner. The rebels expect the government to renege on negotiated settlement autonomy provisions. Accordingly, peripheral ethnic wars might end with a settlement but can flare up again if the rebels grow impatient waiting for provisions to be implemented and/or the rebels do not trust the government.

Conclusion

Duration and recurrence are related yet distinct phenomena. Duration captures time, and recurrence the decision to renew fighting after it has stopped for a time. They differ in that duration does not necessarily involve a decision by a disputant. For example, one side can be militarily defeated and the duration ends. There is no decision to be made. Recurrence necessarily involves a decision, usually by the rebels, to resume fighting after a spell of peace. The decisions makers have the knowledge of hindsight and will recall events of the preceding war.

Civil war duration tends to increase when credible commitment is lacking, the war is ethnic/peripheral, there are lootable natural resources the rebels can exploit, there are spoilers and a good number of veto players, and when there is third-party intervention. "Reversing" these factors makes for shorter wars. The factors are cumulative in that an ethnic war in the presence of lootable resources, low credible commitment, and spoilers will be expected to last a very long time. Wars over government with no spoilers or lootables will be expected to be shorter.

Civil wars are more likely to recur if the war is ethnic/peripheral, credible commitment is lacking, the outcome is one of negotiated settlement, the war did not see an exceptionally high death rate, there are factors conducive to rebel recruitment such as low democracy and a weak economy at war's end, there are valuable natural resources present in the rebel territory, the war is not mediated, and there is no effective peacekeeping operation. Again, these factors can be flipped to yield lower probabilities of recurrence and they are cumulative.

There are important policy implications at work here. Mediators can work to overcome credible commitment problems and the international community can work towards further progress in curtailing the exploitation of lootable commodities during war. For example, the UN-coordinated Kimberley Process has made it harder to deal in black market diamonds.

Note

- 1 Available at: www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_conflict_termination_dataset/.

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