

BACKGROUND: CURRENT AND POTENTIAL EMPLOYMENT OF THE MANEUVER ENHANCEMENT BRIGADE

By Dr. John A. Bonin

Beginning in September 2003, the United States Army began envisioning—then converting to—a fundamentally new organizational design, while simultaneously conducting combat operations in two overseas contingencies. Later termed the *modular force*, this conversion would shift the Army from a division-based structure to a modular, brigade-based force. As described by one historian, “This massive effort would represent the most far-reaching transformation of the Army’s operational forces since World War II and the most radical since the Pentomic reorganization of the late 1950s.”¹ This transformation changed the Army from generating and employing divisions in decisive land operations to providing the joint commander a flexible mix of different brigades with requisite command and control (C2) for land control operations as part of an interdependent joint force. The shift makes it easier for the Army to strategically tailor land forces to the combatant commanders’ full spectrum requirements and employ flexible, smaller formations distributed across an expanded operational area.

The initial modular design envisioned that a division-size force would control six basic types of brigades:

- Maneuver
- Aviation
- Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR)
- Protection
- Strike
- Tactical sustainment

The protection and ISR brigades became the most transformational, as well as the most controversial. This article will describe the conception and evolution of the original protection brigade to the current maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB) and offer some potential employment options for the MEB.

Background

To most Army officers, the MEB is a completely strange and new organization that appears to threaten several single-branch structures. Field Manual (FM) 3-90.31, *Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Operations*, states that “the MEB has no direct antecedents in today’s force structure.”² That is not completely correct. The Army struggled during the 20th century to find the best organizational solution for placement of maneuver support units—engineer; military police; and chemical, biological, radiological,

nuclear, high-yield explosive (CBRNE). In the Army’s first permanent divisional structure of 1917, the 28,000-man square division not only had four infantry regiments in two brigades and an artillery brigade of three regiments as organic units but also had division trains of nearly 3,000 with a military police platoon and an engineer regiment of 1,672 personnel. The 1920 postwar infantry division, reduced to some 19,000, included an engineer regiment of 867 Soldiers and a military police company of 155 Soldiers.

For World War II, the triangular infantry division not only included an engineer battalion of 664 and a military police platoon of 73, but the division also received standard augmentation from corps or Army levels of additional engineer, military police, and chemical units. By 1961, the new Reorganization Objective Army Division-concept infantry division still retained a robust engineer battalion of 970 personnel and a military police company of 178, while the Division 86 studies added a chemical defense company with a strength of 141 in the 1980s.³ Just before the first Gulf War, the Army reorganized corps engineer assets in the heavy division to form the division engineer (DIVENG) command of three combat engineer battalions with more than 1,000 Soldiers, while retaining military police and CBRNE companies as separate divisional troops. Before Operation Iraqi Freedom, each heavy division had an assortment of nondivisional units totaling more than 12,000 personnel that constituted its doctrinal augmentation for major combat operations in addition to its organic assets. This package included 3,490 additional engineers in a group of four battalions, a chemical battalion of 864 Soldiers, and some 512 military police Soldiers in two companies and several teams. In addition, a Reserve Component rear operations center was allocated to each division to supervise rear security. Essentially, on the eve of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Army still had not solved the challenge of how to organize and synchronize “stovepiped” maneuver support assets.

During 2003-2004, the leaders of the Warrior Brigade at Fort Polk, Louisiana, offered a solution for the lack of combat support in the austere design of the new Stryker brigade combat teams (SBCTs), built around the Stryker armored vehicle. Called the Stryker Support Group, it consolidated the United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) engineer, military police, CBRNE, and other sustainment units into an operational unit designed to provide backup support to SBCTs upon deployment. It also included a signal battalion to supervise the “digital bridge” signal companies being created outside the SBCT, but intended to

Proposed Stryker Support Group at Fort Polk Organization (February 2004)

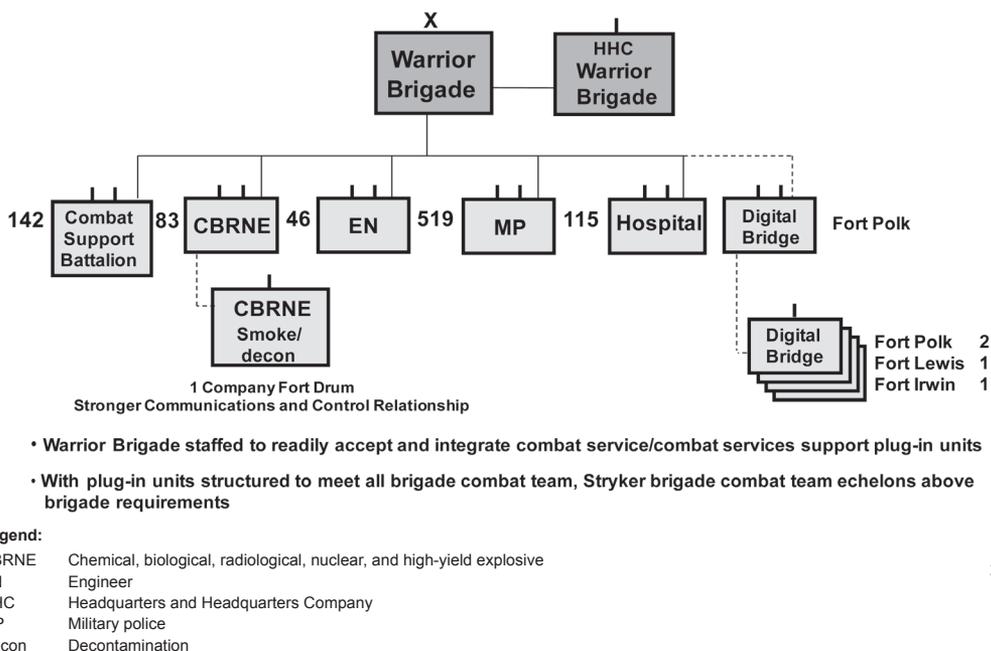


Figure 1

provide dedicated support⁴ (see Figure 1). Not surprisingly, the Warrior Brigade transformed into the first Regular Army MEB—1st MEB—in 2007.

The need for a better organizational structure for maneuver support was evident during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, in which ad hoc headquarters provided command and control (C2) for missions where no standing headquarters previously existed. Even more flexible, adaptive headquarters will be needed for emerging missions to alleviate such ad hoc requirements.⁵ Likewise, in Operation Enduring Freedom, engineer, military police, CBRNE, and other support elements experienced C2 challenges because they arrived without their normal higher headquarters. A properly tailored MEB could serve as an operational protection and maneuver support headquarters for such orphaned units.⁶

The initial drive to Baghdad by the 3d Infantry Division in Operation Iraqi Freedom also provided some new organizational models. During that operation, the division employed its Engineer Brigade in several non doctrinal ways (see Figure 2, page 7). While providing organic battalions to directly support the division's three maneuver brigades, the Engineer Brigade received control of additional divisional and nondivisional assets, as well as responsibility for operational area management. In essence, the Engineer Brigade owned the division rear and had control of a mechanized task force and the divisional air defense artillery battalion for security at Objective Peach, an important bridge across the Euphrates River. It also supervised the 937th Engineer

Group from corps in its performance of main supply route maintenance and general engineering.⁷

Later, the Engineer Brigade, located at the Baghdad Airport, conducted operations such as terrain management, life support, and force protection.⁸ "The unit helped restore power, water, and sewage to portions of Baghdad,"⁹ overcoming problems with personnel shortfalls, logistics support, and communications. In a similar situation, an MEB headquarters could have provided a more robust operations staff, military police Soldiers, logistics, and communications capabilities.

In addition, the Army formed an exploitation task force out of the 75th Field Artillery Brigade to conduct site operations at a number of sensitive locations in Iraq, such as suspected sites for weapons of mass destruction. The task force included technical escort, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), CBRNE, and intelligence units. Due to the importance of its task and its composition, this type of function should not be performed by an ad hoc unit.¹⁰

The Army has always provided augmentation support to the United States Marine Corps during major operations, and Operation Iraqi Freedom was no different. The support United States Army Central provided to the First Marine Expeditionary Force consisted of more than 3,000 personnel in two brigade/group headquarters and seven battalions with a wide spectrum of capabilities.¹¹ Analysis indicated that a single MEB could have provided a better single Army point of contact for the support provided to the Marines (see Figure 3, page 7).

“MEBs are transformational, multifunctional units that offer tremendous potential for full spectrum operations in an era of persistent conflict.”

Starting in late 2002, the National Defense University's Center for Technology and National Security Policy (CTNSP) began a study of an organization to be dedicated to stabilization and reconstruction (S&R) functions. The concept evolved over a period of time until presented as “stability and reconstruction joint commands” in the final version of *Transforming for Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations*.¹² This paper argued that while recent military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq were characterized by the rapid defeat of enemy military forces, and relatively small deployments of American forces, American armed forces were not nearly as well prepared to respond promptly to the lawlessness, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and attacks on coalition forces that followed the defeat of the Iraqi military. This failure to establish security emboldened those who opposed the coalition.

In the view of the CTNSP editors, it was precisely the success of the U.S. military in transforming its forces to execute rapid, decisive operations that makes it imperative to transform the way it prepares for and executes S&R operations. The very rapid defeat of our enemies meant that the United States should have been ready to field the resources needed to secure stability and begin the reconstruction process promptly—ideally concurrently—with the end of major combat. That could only be done if planning for the S&R operations was integrated into planning from the beginning and the right skills were in-theater to begin operations concurrently with the collapse of the enemy military.¹³

“Because future contingencies could impose such diverse conditions and requirements for capabilities, U.S. forces should have a diverse set of assets capable of performing a wide variety of S&R functions. They should also be modular, flexible, and adaptable so that they can be combined and recombined to create different packages tailored to each situation. While creating such forces is a complicated task that requires detailed planning, a notional S&R command would provide a healthy portfolio of assets for most situations. It contains some combat forces—a Stryker brigade augmented with an attack helicopter battalion—for demanding security tasks. The core forces for the S&R mission are four battalions of military police, construction engineers, civil affairs, medical support, psychological operations, and other assets commonly needed for S&R tasks. . . . Such an S&R joint command might be organized into three or four brigade-size task forces for S&R missions, a combat brigade, and division-level combat service support forces. Its S&R brigades could be detached to assist combat divisions or be kept under the S&R command.”¹⁴

Based on their analysis, CTNSP argued for two S&R joint commands organized to conduct core S&R operations across a theater of operations. One would be composed

primarily of Regular Army units. The second would be in the Reserve Component but with an active headquarters and active key cadre at the next lower commands (the S&R group). At least initially, the S&R joint command would not require permanently assigned subunits except for its immediate subordinate S&R group headquarters and its special staff. However, specific battalion-equivalent units of each type would be designated as S&R units by priority mission and in operational plans and must be ready for immediate deployment.¹⁵ Building on the concepts presented in the CTNSP paper, then-Colonel Bryan G. Watson (now Brigadier General Watson, commandant of the United States Army Engineer School) argued in his 2005 United States Army War College strategy research project for a substantial “progressive stabilization” capability for the expeditionary United States Army, to include multifunctional “stabilization brigades” in support of BCTs.¹⁶ Conceptually, these S&R groups and stabilization brigades are MEBs.

Task Force Modularity

As part of Task Force Modularity design work beginning in September 2003, several organizational precedents had to be considered. Besides designing modular units of action (UAs)—which later became BCTs—we also considered five types of multifunctional support units of action (SUAs)—which later became support brigades—that each division would normally have. Support that UAs might need only part of the time could not be provided as permanent, organic assets. Likewise, we attempted to revise the division from a large, fixed structure with a specific set of organic units to a flexible structure, unit of employment-X (UEX) with a tailored set of support units.¹⁷ The protection brigade was initially one of five division-level multifunctional support units considered in the use of engineer, military police, CBRNE, and air defense artillery assets. The resulting protection UA also had the mission to perform rear area security at the division level in place of a division rear operations center.

As we initially envisioned it, the protection UA was designed to use assigned assets to shape, leverage, and mitigate the effects of the operational environment to enable, enhance, and protect strategic, operational, and tactical freedom of action. The protection UA was to be a multifunctional brigade headquarters with the primary task of providing C2 for assigned, attached, or operationally controlled air missile defense, engineer, military police, and CBRNE forces operating in support of task-organized joint, interagency, and multinational forces. The brigade headquarters was to be enabled, by elements drawn from the pool of available forces, to form a mission-tailored force package designed to meet a discrete mission set in support of a

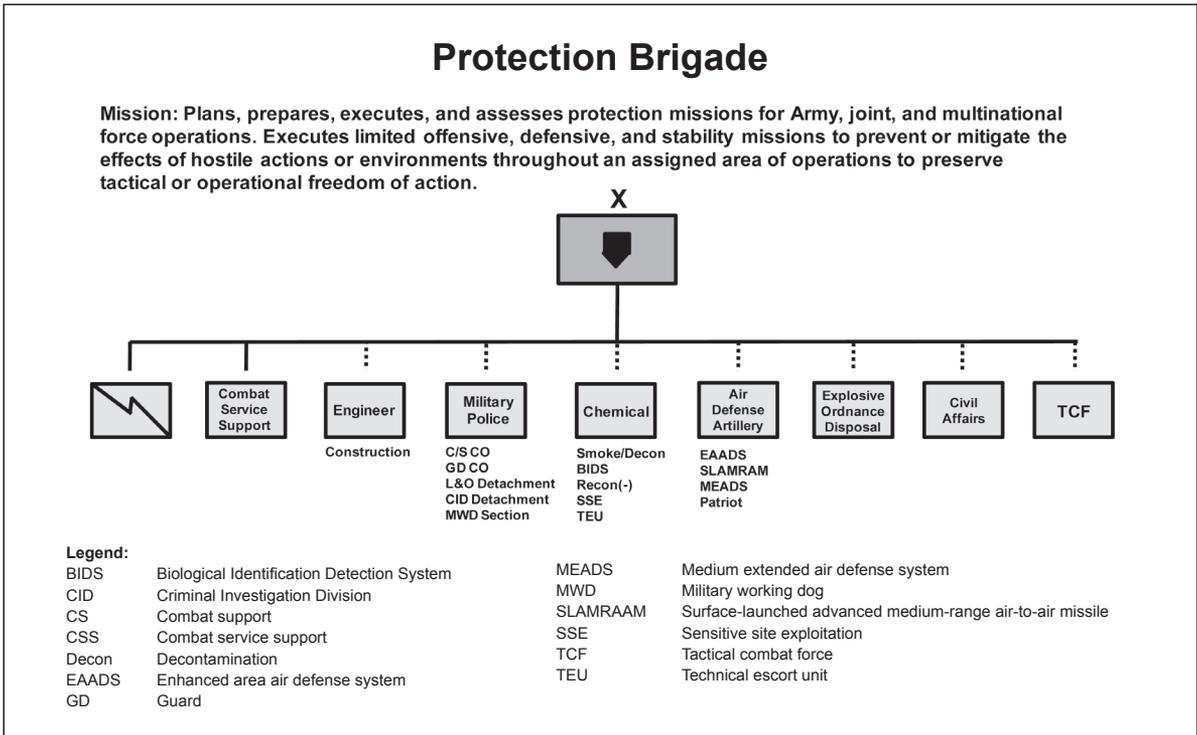


Figure 4

higher headquarters. The protection UA could operate independently of a UEx, but would normally be deployed in support of multiple maneuver UAs, a UEx, joint force command, other service, or a multinational or functional component commander. The protection UA could be assigned an area of operations or used to form a rear area headquarters. Its subordinate elements could be task-organized in support to maneuver UAs. The protection UA could provide C2 for maneuver, civil affairs, and psychological operations assets in combined arms battalions or companies, depending on the mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations (METT-TC). It provided coordination and supervision of security operations for areas designated by higher headquarters. With suitable augmentation from civil affairs, psychological operations, and sustainment forces, the protection UA could also perform as an S&R brigade headquarters. The protection UA might receive CBRNE/EOD augmentation to serve as a sensitive site exploitation task force when required (see Figure 4).¹⁸ That protection UA became today's MEB.

Current MEB Employment

Since the original conception of the MEB, several have been employed. During 2005-2006, the 555th Engineer Group was labeled a provisional combat support brigade (maneuver enhancement), but it remained organized only as an engineer group and did not have C2 over other types of units.¹⁹ In 2008, the 110th MEB, Missouri Army National Guard, deployed as the United States brigade-level headquarters for Kosovo. The 1st MEB, Task Force Warrior, deployed to Afghanistan the same year, essentially

in lieu of a BCT. For the deployment, the unit received only three focused days of mission training and had several key billet shortfalls. It had a large area of operations with four provinces—three stability-focused and one offensive operation-focused. The unit was not tailored with sufficient liaison officers, an ISR company, or information operations capabilities. The 1st MEB did receive significant inter-agency augmentation in Afghanistan from the Department of State, the United States Agency for International Aid, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the United States Public Health Service, and the United States Department of Agriculture. The recently activated 4th MEB, as well as additional National Guard MEBs, may be employed in the role of CBRNE Consequence Management Response Force (CCMRF) headquarters under United States Army North control. The CCMRF is a tailored joint force capable of rapidly deploying to an incident site to provide technical CBRNE mitigation, medical, and aviation support to civil authorities.²⁰ MEBs in such operations would be more effective if considered by Department of the Army and FORSCOM to be similar to a BCT rather than a functional support brigade in regard to training center access and force tailoring.

Potential MEB Employment

With the agreement of the Iraqi government and the guidance of the American president, all Army combat brigades must be out of Iraq by 2010. However, selected advisory and training assistance personnel will remain through 2011. The Army has already begun designating tailored BCTs to be specifically tailored to serve as advisory and assistance brigades (AABs). As part of this new strategy, MEBs could back up the AABs with up to

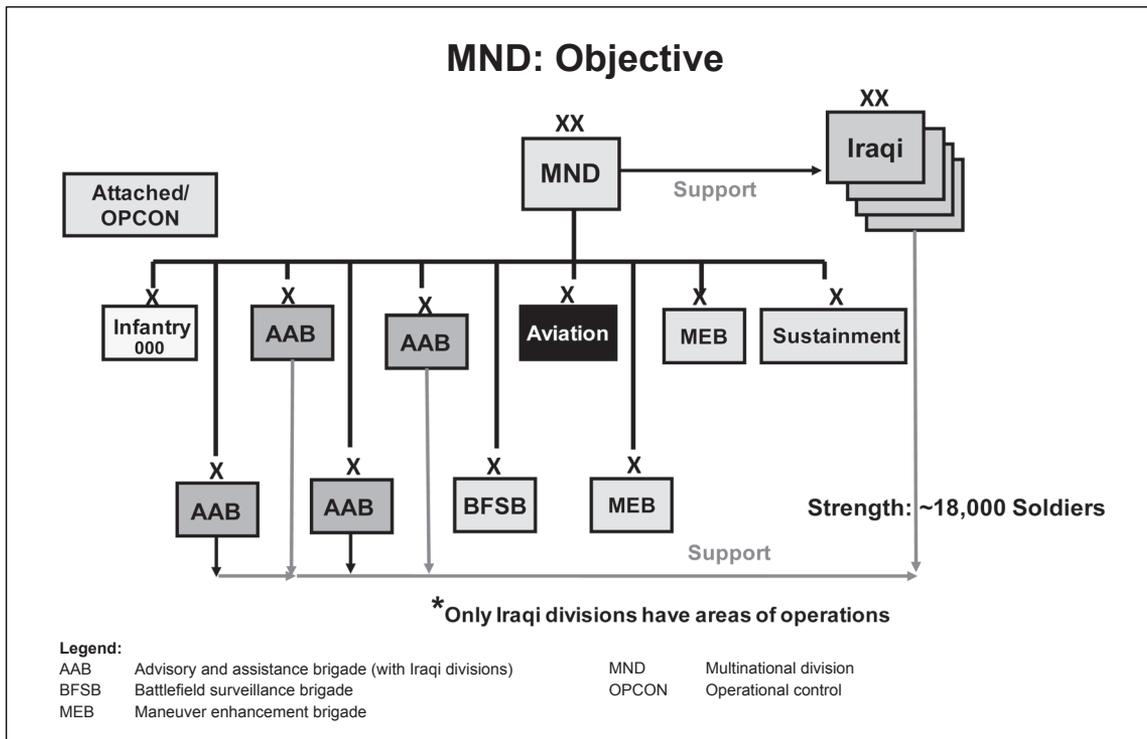


Figure 5

battalion-size tactical reaction forces and provide essential support to Iraqi army divisions as part of specially organized multinational divisions. Potential advantages to this construct would be to—

- Reduce the strain on BCTs.
- Reinforce the Army’s supporting role (MEBs are not BCTs).
- Provide C2 for critical enabling engineer, military police, EOD, and civil affairs Soldiers and others.

Potential disadvantages include—

- Higher security risks due to reduced combat power.
- Lack of sufficient Regular Army MEBs to sustain a viable Army Force Generation rotation (see Figure 5).

Conclusion

MEBs are transformational, multifunctional units that offer tremendous potential for full spectrum operations in an era of persistent conflict. While this article focuses on the MEB’s background and several potential uses in current stability operations, the MEB also has great utility in both major combat operations in support of BCTs, as joint security area coordinators, and for domestic civil support operations. MEBs are neither BCTs nor single functional brigades. Each of the different brigades has its place in the total modular force and its unique competencies for different missions, but overlap also exists. While BCTs are primarily intended for C2 of an operational area, they can be reconfigured for stability. MEBs are the only other

brigade designed to control operational areas as well as perform stability and maneuver support tasks. Functional engineer, military police, and CBRNE brigades are intended for focused efforts in those specific areas, but the MEB and its multifunctional staff also provide overlapping C2 for those functions. One of the ways for the Army to mitigate its risk of having only 45 instead of 48 Regular Army BCTs would be to add three Regular Army MEBs. These could be stationed at the divisional locations that are losing BCTs. For example, an MEB at Fort Stewart, Georgia, would provide the 3d Infantry Division the multifunctional maneuver support headquarters it needed in Operation Iraqi Freedom and provide simplified C2 for the engineer, military police, and CBRNE units already stationed there.



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Endnotes

¹William M. Donnelly, *Transforming an Army at War: Designing the Modular Force, 1991-2005*, Center of Military History, Washington, D.C., 2007, p. iii.

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⁴Colonel Patrick Landry, "Warrior Brigade Transformation to Stryker Support Group," PowerPoint presentation, 18 February 2004.

⁵James D. Shumway, "A Strategic Analysis of the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Strategy Research Project," United States Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 18 March 2005, p. 8.

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⁷Author's discussion with Colonel John Peabody. (See also "3d Infantry Division After-Action Review, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Engineer," United States Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2003, Chapter 15.)

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¹⁰Shumway, p. 9.

¹¹Gregory Fontenot, E.J. Degen, and David Tohn, *On Point, U.S. Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (CFLCC Order of Battle, 1 May 2003), Combat Studies Institute Press, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2004, pp. 448-454.

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¹³Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 56-59.

¹⁵Colonel Bryan G. Watson, "Reshaping the Expeditionary Army to Win Decisively: The Case for Stabilization," Strategy Research Project, United States Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 18 March 2005, pp. 13-14.

¹⁶John A. Bonin and Telford E. Crisco, "The Modular Army," *Military Review*, March-April 2004, pp. 21-27.

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¹⁹Colonel William E. Rapp, Commander, 555th Combat Support Brigade (Maneuver Enhancement) (Provisional), e-mail, 22 November 2005.

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