

PUTTING GEOGRAPHY BACK INTO THE MILITARY CANON

A Review Essay by

EWAN W. ANDERSON

Military Geography for
Professionals and the Public
by John M. Collins
Washington: National Defense
University Press, 1998.
437 pp. \$39.00
[ISBN 0-16-049405-2]

The relevance of geography to military affairs was recognized as early as the classical age. The *Geography of Strabo* was a wide-ranging discourse on every aspect of the subject and of equal use to travelers and military commanders alike. Battles waged on land and at sea in ancient Greece demonstrate the relation between tactics and the finer points of landscape and nearshore seascape.

However, geography itself was rarely treated as a formal discipline until the 18th and 19th centuries; thus military geography was not regarded as a subset of the specialty before then. In fact the first acknowledged volume on military geography is probably Lavalley's *Geographie Physique, Historique, et Militaire*, published in 1836. As the 19th century waned, the great age of discovery, initiated by Columbus and other intrepid navigators some 400 years earlier, came to a close. With a few exceptions, the extent of the global land masses was known and the world could be viewed as a closed system. Sir Halford Mackinder, whose article "The Geographical Pivot of History" set in train the development of a global geopolitical viewpoint still in evidence today, took spectacular military advantage of this fact. But though there were obvious military implications in the way it developed, particularly as guided by Karl Haushofer in Germany, geopolitics is not confined to the study of conflict. The most widely read work on the subject was *Imperial Military Geography* by

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David H. Cole, printed in 11 editions between 1924 and 1953.

The nature of warfare changed dramatically with the advent of the bomb and the Cold War, and many earlier concepts of military geography became obsolete. This point is documented in the four volumes of *A Bibliography of Military Geography*, edited by Eugene J. Palka and Dawn M. Lake, which was published in 1988. But the new military geography yielded few significant titles. One notable exception was *Military Geography* by Louis C. Peltier and George E. Percy, which appeared in 1966. Nevertheless, an explicit link with ideas predating the nuclear era was provided in 1989 by Hugh Faringdon with the publication of *Strategic Geography*, which considered all types of military operations from the strategic to the tactical level.

While there have been few seminal volumes on military geography, every epoch in military history has spawned at least one major work. Since 1989, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, concepts of warfare have once again undergone change. Absent a global threat and the strategic constraints of a bipolar world, mid-level, small-scale, and low intensity warfare have grown in importance. Although nuclear weapons are still largely in play, the nature of war is being increasingly dictated by the principles of the pre-nuclear era. The key changes since that time have been the exponential advances in military technology and a range of activities classified as forms of military operations. Accordingly, the role of the military has expanded. This point was considered in *GeoJournal* (October 1993, October 1994, and October 1995) as well as by Martin van Creveld in *The Transformation of War*, published in 1991. But the effects of major geopolitical change on military geography have not been assessed as yet.

Geography is a broad subject that has long defied thorough definition. Suffice it to say that it combines many physical and human elements. Field Marshall Lord Inge, Britain's former Chief of Defence Staff, recently stated that the missions of the military are intensive warfare, operations other than war, peacekeeping (and related activities), and military diplomacy. Obviously, military geography plays a significant role in planning and executing each of these missions.

In a foreword to *Military Geography for Professionals and the Public* by John M. Collins, the President of the National Defense University describes this new volume as follows: "[It] relates virtually

every aspect of the physical world we live in to every imaginable endeavor in the military realm." Collins has marshalled four decades of research in a work that is written in plain, direct language which makes it accessible to both military officers and general readers. The author states his intent in the introduction: to produce a text for academic use, provide a handbook for political-military specialists, and enhance public awareness of the impact of geography on military affairs.

This approach implies extensive coverage, and at some 450 pages it is a substantial tome. In his introductory overview Collins lists both major military considerations and basic geographical factors—physical and cultural—which emphasize specific elements rather than generic categories, although overall the inventories are comprehensive. The following subsection on regional quirks considers homogeneous geographical regions and basic climatic distinctions. Turning to what the author calls avoidable abuses the tone is set for later segments by citing examples from the panoply of military history. Particularly memorable is the assertion that Che Guevara paid with his life for "geographic ignorance." Then Collins discusses a framework for area analysis. The early sections thus establish an approach that is far-reaching in scope and rich in detail.

After treating spatial relations—location, size, and shape—which exercised Mackinder and other advocates of geopolitics, Collins examines the lay of the land, oceans and seashores, earth's atmosphere, regional peculiarities, inner and outer space, and natural resources and raw materials.

Rather than dwelling on geomorphological terminology in the section on the lay of the land, the author categorizes landforms into what may be more appropriate military terms: high ground, relatively level land, and depressions. The implication of each is considered, making particular use of historical precedent. There is a detailed treatment of rivers, drainage, and water, yet no analysis of specific landforms such as sand dunes. The subsection on geology and soils deals mainly with surface characteristics and load-bearing capacities of various soils under different conditions. And finally, under the rubric of vegetation, forests are compared with what the author delightfully calls "scantly clad landscapes." In the context of the latter landscapes he concludes that Desert Storm took place on the "geographic equivalent of a sand-colored pool table."

The ensuing section on oceans and seashores affords a closer look at those environments. Major processes and landforms are presented together with related naval problems. While mention could have been made to the effects of the Law of the Sea Treaty on naval activity, that discussion might have been a digression. An examination of the earth's atmosphere identifies key phenomena and contrasts the significance of climatology and meteorology. Thus the three main sections on the major elements in which the military operate are generally covered in sufficient detail to distinguish the geographical components of any military situation. However, the section on the land surface is noticeably thinner and more idiosyncratic than the others. This is balanced by thorough discussion on

regional peculiarities, which describes core environments. Here there is no general pattern, but the main military problems are assessed and excellent detailed examples are provided.

There is a short section on inner and outer space, and obviously a more detailed treatment awaits greater military familiarity. The final section on natural resources and raw materials is rather thin and focuses on strategic minerals and petroleum. An evaluation of water and food as strategic resources might have been useful. Certainly hydrogeopolitics, with its emphasis on the geographical and the military, merits greater attention in many regions of the world.

The part on cultural geography comprises sections on populations, urbanization, lines of communication, military bases, and fortresses and field

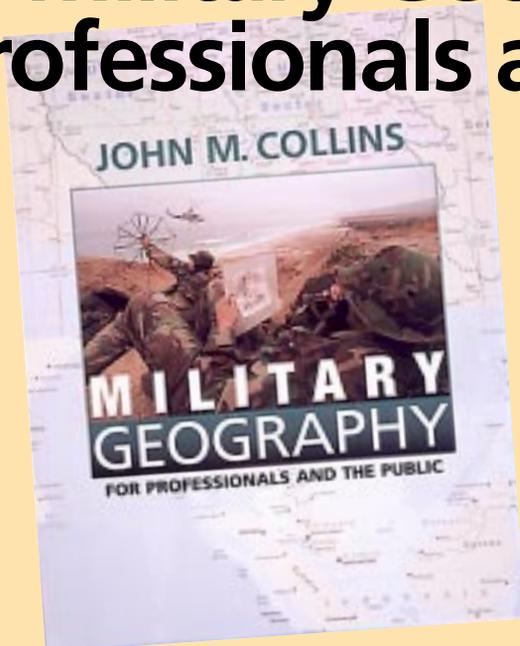
fortifications. From a strictly geographical viewpoint, some thought might have been given to the economic pursuits of man in the landscape: agriculture and industry, primary and secondary. Furthermore, since many conflicts are associated with them, political landscape components such as frontiers and boundaries warrant inclusion.

The section on populations is distinctly idiosyncratic, ranging from a standard treatment of population density to a discussion on national personalities. However, it all makes riveting reading and is pertinent to peace operations. There is also an expansive treatment of urbanization, but this has a clearly military bias and is one of the book's most useful sections. It must be one of the few real world analyses of different scales of military activity in the urban landscape.

New from the

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by John M. Collins

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Communications are examined in a more traditional but very comprehensive analysis. For example, there are discussions of key factors such as gradients and choke points. The remaining sections are largely military in nature and are geographical only in that they describe locations. Nonetheless, both provide useful summaries.

Part three offers an overview of political-military geography and thus differs in scale from the foregoing chapters. The most compelling portion is an examination of geopolitical friction, the geographical factors associated with specific conflict flashpoints. It is divided into five subsections on territorial, strategic, economic, cultural, and environmental factors. Clearly, it is impossible to provide a full inventory of every aspect of global tension, but the selection presented by the author affords ample consideration of military and geographical variables. The other sections in this part concern military viewpoints and military areas of responsibility.

The fourth and final part focuses on area analyses. It initially draws on material introduced earlier in the book to establish a framework for area analyses, which the ensuing sections employ to look at Operation Neptune (the cross-channel assault on D-Day beachheads in June 1944) and Operation Plan El Paso (a stillborn endeavor to sever the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1967–68). Both of these historical examples convey the practical application of military geography and thus constitute an appraisal of the book as a whole.

In sum, *Military Geography for Professionals and the Public* is a valuable addition to the literature on military geography. The sections on urbanization and geopolitical friction are particularly compelling. Moreover, the author offers broad coverage of his subject. Although the discussion becomes obscure in places, every author is entitled to such indulgences. Military issues are mainly treated in the context of detailed examples. Taken collectively, they illustrate the four missions identified by Lord Inge. However, relating the range of military activities to geography in this tome calls for hard work on the part of the reader. Each work of military geography bears the unmistakable imprint of its author and some discussion of peripheral topics. John Collins, a venerable practitioner of the military art, has pointed the way forward for greater research and development in the field of military geography. **JFQ**

... TO THE SHORES OF TURTLE BAY

A Book Review by

MICHAEL A. SHEEHAN

Blue Helmets: The Strategy of U.N. Military Operations

by John F. Hillen

Washington: Brassey's Inc., 1998.

320 pp. \$26.95

[ISBN 1-57488-138-8]

The United Nations had about 18,000 peacekeepers around the world in 1991, conducting operations along relatively quiet cease-fire lines in the Middle East, in Cyprus, and on the India-Pakistan border. Though located in explosive areas, these U.N. operations were comparatively stable and self-managed. Within four years peacekeeping expanded to over 80,000 "blue helmets" in the field, and at one point the United Nations managed three huge operations (Cambodia, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia), each involving a major civil conflict. Almost as quickly as peacekeepers expanded their presence, they were scaled back to traditional levels of about 20,000.

In his book, *Blue Helmets: The Strategy of U.N. Military Operations*, John Hillen surveys U.N. operations and focuses on the crisis period between 1993 and 1996. The product of research for his doctorate at Oxford University, the volume is extremely well documented and systematic in its analysis. A former Army officer and combat veteran of the Gulf War, Hillen narrows his focus to the military aspects of U.N. operations and specifically to force structure, command and control, and military objectives.

In the introduction the author recognizes that the military aspects of an operation cannot be divorced from the broader context of diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian endeavors. Military operations are one part of a larger puzzle and should not be exclusively credited with the success or failure of U.N. missions. In the final

analysis, success or failure lies principally with the parties to a conflict and their political leaders. Nevertheless the focus of *Blue Helmets* on the military aspects is a corrective to the political or multidisciplinary approach of other recent works on this subject.

The author groups U.N. operations into observer missions (such as the Middle East and India-Pakistan), traditional peacekeeping (Cyprus and Lebanon), second generation peacekeeping (Somalia and Bosnia), and enforcement actions (Korea and Desert Storm). While one might argue with these categorizations, they prove to be effective in the subsequent analysis.

Observer missions were born out of necessity to complement Middle East peace processes between 1948 and 1968. Hillen carefully considers mandates, force structure, and command and control arrangements by sampling missions from the early Middle East operations to El Salvador and Guatemala in the early 1990s. His analysis here is sound but a bit repetitious. He concludes that U.N. military determinations such as force structure and assigned tasks were driven more by political considerations than military planning. This often results in a small number of ill-equipped and poorly trained troops taking on overly ambitious military tasks such as overextended patrolling zones and essentially political tasks such as conflict resolution. Nevertheless the author gives these observers fairly high marks and recognizes their contribution to the broader political processes they were sent to support.

The next section treats what is called traditional peacekeeping, a classic case being the long running operation in Cyprus. Traditional peacekeepers are deployed in organized units, usually infantry battalions, instead of the individual commissioned and non-commissioned officers assigned to observer missions. Political considerations, however, are similar to those of observer missions: military units operate with the consent of the belligerents. In such missions, *Blue Helmets* identifies what will haunt large operations which await the United Nations

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U.S. peacekeepers in
Skopje, Macedonia.



U.S. Air Force (Charlie Parshey)

in the future: the tendency of force commanders to call home to their capitals when facing difficulties, particularly the use of force.

The lessons of peacekeeping are already taking shape as the author turns to the crisis period of second generation peacekeeping. These operations, frequently conducted under chapter VII of the U.N. Charter and with the authority to use force to protect or implement mandates, include the well-known and controversial efforts in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. Although it rehearses events discussed elsewhere, the book's examination of the purely military planning aspects of such operations contributes significantly to the literature. The problems identified in earlier missions are exacerbated by size and because they are being conducted in the midst of civil conflicts as opposed to cease-fire lines. Force structure (participating countries have varied objectives and capabilities), command and control (advanced communications allow them to call home frequently), and "mission creep" into nonmilitary tasks posed difficulties in these operations from start to finish.

Not surprisingly, the author's conclusions are similar to those of the Clinton administration (Presidential Decision Directive 25) and the United

Nations (Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace II*). They each conclude that although the United Nations can conduct narrowly defined peacekeeping operations with the consent of the parties, more complex enforcement operations are best left to a coalition of willing and capable member states, such as NATO.

It is hard to argue with this judgment, especially for this reviewer who participated in such processes in both Washington and New York. However, these sweeping generalities were made prior to the quiet revolution in peacekeeping of the past few years.

Since 1995 the United Nations and the United States have combined to achieve remarkable success in several low profile operations in the Balkans. In eastern Slavonia, an American chief of mission supervised an operation that included over 7,000 troops, tanks and attack helicopters, and an enforcement mandate. In Macedonia a preventive deployment operation included U.S. combat units in blue helmets and contributed to stability in that volatile spot. On the Prevlaka Peninsula along the Adriatic Sea a handful of peacekeepers helped keep an explosive Serb-Croatian flashpoint quiet. Although some may argue that it is early to assess

the ultimate results of the Haiti operation, the military operation clearly enjoyed enormous success in sustaining the returned democratically elected government, finishing the demobilization of an entire army, monitoring an interim police force, and providing a stable environment for new political and judicial institutions.

The final chapter in *Blue Helmets* deals with two enforcement actions, the Korean War and Desert Storm, and does not really fit. Both operations, although sanctioned by the United Nations, were not under blue helmets and were not peacekeeping operations, as were all others in the book. Perhaps a better example of a non-U.N. operation is the French, Italian, and specifically American experience in Lebanon during 1982 and 1983. In that case, the U.S. military had a unified force structure and coherent chain of command but found itself in a political quagmire.

It culminated in the worst American peacekeeping experience when over two hundred marines were killed by a terrorist truck bomb. Despite this setback, the United States and its NATO allies did not conclude that they were incapable of conducting complex peacekeeping operations. Instead it is necessary to act smarter and be more politically astute, as demonstrated over the last few years in Bosnia.

Blue Helmets is a valuable tool for peacekeeping planners, both military and political. The Clinton administration recently stressed that "details matter" on weapons inspection issues in Iraq, even for senior political leaders. This also applies to military aspects of peacekeeping. This book also is a sobering reminder to those who might be tempted "to throw peacekeepers at a crisis" and then expect them to be a panacea for deeper political questions. Blending the political and military requirements of peacekeeping proves in the end to be more art than science. However, successful planners and practitioners must be grounded in sound principles and experience. John Hillen has made a major contribution to the study of the military art of peacekeeping. **JFQ**

LEANER, MEANER (AND DEJECTED?) SOLDIERS

A Book Review by

HARRY G. SUMMERS, JR.

The Downsized Warrior: America's Army in Transition

by David McCormick

New York: New York University

Press, 1998.

259 pp. \$24.95

[ISBN 0-81475-584-4]

Beware of baby-boomers bearing books. The most narcissistic, self-centered generation in history, they believe as a matter of faith that the world began when they were born and perforce all the trials and tribulations they have experienced happened to them alone. Thus they hold that the Vietnam War was the most brutal, inhumane, and horrific in the history of mankind. The reality, as my battalion operations sergeant, a veteran of Bastogne, informed complaining boomer riflemen in the bush near Phuoc Vinh in 1966, is that by comparison to his war it was a walk in the woods.

Now comes David McCormick—management consultant, West Point graduate, and veteran of the Gulf War—to tell us about another “extraordinary” experience suffered by his generation. *Downsized Warrior*, based on a doctoral dissertation presented to Princeton University, is “a tale of two armies. It is a story of the corporate army, which unsuccessfully resisted deep reductions in its budget and endstrength. . . . But it is also the story of the muddy boots army—a corps of officers . . . who have been dramatically and unfavorably affected by downsizing.” Incremental cuts in personnel over a long time have degraded the officer corps, opines McCormick, damaging professionalism, morale, career expectations, and organizational commitment. Careerism as well as competition are pushing out cooperation and initiative. He concludes, “make no mistake: these trends, alarming in and of themselves, are even more so if seen as harbingers of darker days to come.” But like his kindred spirits in Vietnam, the author lacks historical perspective.

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Consider McCormick's discovery that “in the decisions leading up to the first two waves of post-Cold War downsizing—the Base Force and the Bottom-Up Review—budgetary and political considerations were the predominant determinants of military policy.” It was ever so. Seventy-five years ago George Marshall pointed out this had been true since the Revolution. Explained the General, the Army was strengthened and then slashed “with somewhat monotonous regularity.” Caught unprepared by the outbreak of war, it was rapidly built up to combat strength. Yet as soon as a conflict ended the public forgot the reason for going to war, became preoccupied with the cost of maintaining large forces, and sought to reduce them. Thus the lessons of unpreparedness were quickly shelved and the Army was decimated yet again.

Downsizing after World War I made today's cuts seem almost inconsequential. Marshall was reduced from lieutenant colonel to major, and the Army's officer corps went from 130,485 in 1918 to 13,784 in 1924. Promotions were practically nonexistent. When I was commissioned in 1957 the general who pinned on my bars said “Son, don't ever be discouraged. I spent 17 years as a first lieutenant.” The policy of the Army, Douglas MacArthur told the Senate in 1935, was to bring everyone along together in peacetime, then to rapidly bring to the fore those who could stand the pressure in war. And that is precisely what the Army did during World War II with majors like Ridgway, lieutenant colonels like Eisenhower, and colonels like Patton.

“Before 1939,” T.R. Fehrenback wrote in *This Kind of War*, “the United States Army was small, but it was professional. Its tiny officer corps was parochial but true. Its members devoted their time to the study of war. . . . They were centurions. . . . When so ordered, they went to war.” All of which begs the question: How could the officer corps, after suffering deprivations beyond the imagination of officers today (including at one time even withholding their pay), rise to the occasion and build the mightiest force the Nation has ever known and then lead it to victory while currently officers, according to McCormick, despair at the least discomfort?

Unfortunately, that question is not addressed. Instead, the book concentrates on post-Cold War downsizing. The opening chapter looks at the politics of downsizing, chapters two and three focus on

the corporate Army, four looks at the effects of downsizing on the “muddy-boots Army,” and the last offers solutions. “While there are no obvious villains . . . there is one obvious victim: a healthy and vital American Army.”

The Army, faced with the monumental task of cutting the officer corps over 30 percent in five years, has carried out the reduction with “great precision, compassion, and success,” according to the author. One reason is the analytic culture which was inculcated by the late General Maxwell Thurman and his “scientific management approach to human relations.”

But that approach had a downside. By its almost total emphasis on quantifiable measures, as I once complained to Thurman, it could conclude that Gore Vidal would make a better soldier than Audie Murphy, a conclusion even Vidal would surely reject. As a result of this “bureaucratic, mechanistic, and impersonal approach to managing people,” McCormick claims, “the post-Cold War Army is not only leaner but also meaner—unhappy, more selfish and competitive, and less committed and cooperative.”

By way of reform, the author states, correctly in my view, we must modify the present policy of “up-or-out” to guarantee longer and more secure military careers and create more flexibility. But he misreads the future by denigrating the mobilization capability of the Reserve Components. His conclusion that tomorrow's conflicts will be come-as-you-are affairs and end before there is time to mobilize either conscripts or Reservists resurrects one of the great fallacies of war. Short wars are always the aim but rarely the reality.

Read *Downsized Warrior* for a most useful history of the post-Cold War downsizing of the Army and for valuable insights into the workings of its personnel system. But put no stock in the notion that the future (in the words of Andrew Krepinevich) will put “a premium on [officers] with cultural sensitivity.” Sensitivity is all well and good, but as Clausewitz warned, “Sooner or later someone will come along with a sharp sword and hack off our arms.”

JFQ

A TRANS-ATLANTIC MID-LIFE CRISIS

A Book Review by

THOMAS-DURELL YOUNG

**NATO on the Brink of the New
Millennium:**

The Battle for Consensus

by Rob de Wijk

London: Brassey's, 1997.

176 pp. \$39.95

[ISBN 1-85753-258-9]

The bureaucratic equivalent of a shocking kiss-and-tell bestseller, *NATO on the Brink of the New Millennium* is a behind-the-scenes account of the debate within the North Atlantic Alliance over changes in the European balance of power. What gives this work credibility is that the author participated in the events described. Rob de Wijk has headed the Conceptual Planning Division of the Ministry of Defence in the Netherlands since 1989, a pivotal position from which to survey the debate. He documents the discussions, debates, and controversies central to NATO reform. Many readers will be surprised to learn about issues that normally remain cloaked under that often abused and intellectually debilitating marking of "NATO Confidential."

This book exposes the challenge to reform. Specifically, de Wijk analyzes two key reform processes which have never been explained to the public. For this reason it is worth a careful read. One learns of the debate held behind closed doors by the Defence Review Committee that produced the "new strategic concept" in 1991, which replaced the strategy of flexible response (MC 14/3). This issue was not debated without considerable acrimony, though consensus was achieved rather quickly by NATO standards and even included the French. Second, one would be well advised to read the sections on the plodding work of the long-term study group (derided by NATO staffers as a life sentence). That group has two tasks. The first is reform of MC 400, which implemented the new strategic concept and the eventual endorsement of MC 400/1. Less successful is the effort to build a consensus on revamping inte-

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Italian tank
destroyer in Pale.

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Lance Cheung)

grated command structure, a task which is rife with national agendas. De Wijk's account of this contentious and so far unsuccessful effort is long overdue.

The book also details creation of the Partnership for Peace program, the struggle to develop the combined joint task force concept, and the intense debate surrounding membership expansion. Particularly informative is the treatment of the never-ending, frustrating task of managing relations with Paris. Here some of the more interesting problems include efforts to entice France to declare forces to the Alliance and rejoin the NATO integrated command structure, and the destructive and confusing polemics which erupted in 1996 over the French proposal to name a European instead of an American as Commander in Chief Southern Europe. In sum, de Wijk covers all the substantive issues that the Alliance has faced since 1989, shedding light on national positions and explaining how consensus was achieved or what led to failure.

This volume will attract an enthusiastic audience among students of NATO adaptation since it began to unfold in 1989. Moreover, American officers will benefit by reviewing it prior to their initial NATO assignments, which often leave newcomers perplexed over the rationale for otherwise straightforward issues and documentation when they encounter it

in an historical vacuum. And finally, the Alliance would be well served if every commander down to the subprincipal subordinate level recommended this book as professional reading to alleviate confusion about NATO commands.

It is remarkable that the author was able to publish this book. Anyone who has written about events that skirt the fringes of allegedly classified information will appreciate the painstaking effort de Wijk went through. However, in this instance equal praise must go to NATO, particularly its Office of Information and Press. That the Alliance supported publication of this singular work, as opposed to a less dichotomous and consequently less valuable monograph, reveals that the struggle to adapt to the new international security environment is advancing. **JFQ**

JFO
welcomes your letters
and comments

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