



July 23, 2008

Daily News Issue Date: July 23, 2008

News Blurb: An ATFP translation of an article by Hasan Khader in Al-Ayyam daily suggests that there may be a double standard in the Arab world for judging human rights violations (1). Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert faces three no-confidence votes as the investigation into alleged bribery continues to challenge his position (3). Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announces that he will remove his troops in the West Bank if the IDF does not cease their operations there (4) (7). Barack Obama pledges to take up the Palestinian-Israeli issue immediately after taking office (5). The ceasefire is holding in Gaza but Hamas warns that it will not last much longer if Israel continues the current state of siege (9). Meanwhile, YNet News reports on Gazans reliance on underground tunnels for smuggling in the goods that they cannot access (11).

Israel's Ehud Olmert Survives 3 No-confidence Votes

Media Outlet: Reuters

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/middleeast/la-fg-israel22-2008jul2...> [1]

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's government survived three no-confidence motions in parliament Monday, even though one of them saw a majority voting against him for the first time.

One motion was approved by 41 votes to 40 after Olmert's Shas coalition partner boycotted the vote.

But under Israeli law, 61 votes are needed to pass a no-confidence motion, which would lead to the dissolution of the 120-member parliament and herald new elections.

Local media reported that legislators from Shas, an Orthodox Jewish party, stayed away from the vote in protest of the appointment of a legislator from the Labor Party, Olmert's main coalition partner, as head of parliament's powerful finance committee.

The result cast further doubt on whether Olmert would survive a police investigation into allegations that he took bribes from an American Jewish businessman.

The veteran politician denies any wrongdoing but has said he would step down if indicted.

His Kadima party is to hold an internal vote in September that could replace him.

Lawyers for Olmert on Monday demanded an investigation into the leaking of transcripts of his police interrogation in the corruption case against him. The transcript was published Sunday by Israel's Maariv daily newspaper.

U.S. fundraiser Morris Talansky testified in May that he had given \$150,000 in cash-stuffed envelopes to Olmert, a former Jerusalem mayor, over a 15-year period. Olmert and Talansky have denied wrongdoing.

Abbas: I'll Pull Out West Bank Forces

Media Outlet: The Associated Press

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=121...> [2]

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas told supporters on Tuesday that he will withdraw his forces from West Bank cities unless Israel halts its army operations there.

Parallel to negotiations with Israel, Abbas has been trying to exert more control in the West Bank and to rein in terrorists. At the same time, the international community is training Abbas's forces, with hopes they will one day take over from Israel.

In recent months, Abbas has deployed forces in two of the unruliest towns, Nablus and Jenin, and residents once harassed by vigilante gunmen say they feel more secure.

However, the IDF argues that the Palestinian forces often coopt former gunmen, instead of jailing them. Despite the presence of the Palestinian forces, IDF troops have continued operating in Palestinian cities, prompting complaints by Abbas that this is undermining him.

On Tuesday, Abbas met with legislators from his Fatah movement, and was asked what he plans to do about the frequent Israeli raids. Abbas is to meet Thursday with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, one of their regular sessions, and said he would bring up the issue.

"We are going to tell the Israelis the day after tomorrow that if the incursions and the aggression and the insults to the Palestinian police continue, we will withdraw these forces," Abbas said.

His comments were carried by the official Palestinian news agency WAFA and confirmed by an aide, as well as a participant in the meeting, Fatah legislator Najah Abu Bakr.

Government spokesman Mark Regev would only say that Israel supports efforts to strengthen the Palestinian security forces. He did not respond to Abbas's warning.

Obama Arrives In Israel, Vows To 'plunge' Into Mideast Peacemaking

Media Outlet: The Associated Press

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1004474.html> [3]

U.S. presidential contender Barack Obama arrived in Israel Tuesday night, facing a full schedule of

meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders after pledging to work for peace as soon as he takes office.

Obama flew to Israel late Tuesday from Jordan, where he condemned an attack a few hours earlier by a Palestinian man from East Jerusalem who rammed a bulldozer into passing cars in central Jerusalem, injuring at least 24 people before being shot dead by a civilian and a Border Police officer.

"Today's bulldozer attack is a reminder of what Israelis have courageously lived with on a daily basis for far too long," Obama said.

Obama said he would plunge into Mideast peacemaking, where efforts have failed for decades, warning there were no quick solutions.

Earlier Tuesday, at a press conference in Amman, Jordan, the Democratic senator promised to work toward achieving a breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations "starting from the minute I'm sworn into office."

Obama added that any U.S. involvement in peace talks must recognize "not only Israel's security concerns but also the economic hardships facing Palestinians."

He said he would continue to "regard Israel as a valued ally. That policy is not going to change," he said.

"What I think can change is the ability of the United States government and a United States president to be actively engaged with the peace process and to be concerned and recognize the legitimate difficulties that the Palestinian people are experiencing right now."

Obama, in the midst of a weeklong high visibility foreign trek, also acknowledged the long history of Middle East tensions that would confront him if he were to become president.

"It's unrealistic to expect that a U.S. president alone can suddenly snap his fingers and bring about peace in this region," he said.

Obama was in Afghanistan and Iraq before arriving in Jordan on Tuesday for talks with King Abdullah. He planned to leave for Israel later in the day. He then is scheduled to travel to Europe.

Obama condemned an attack in Jerusalem on Tuesday, where a Palestinian man rammed a construction vehicle into cars and a bus near the downtown hotel where Obama was scheduled to stay later in the day. An Israeli civilian and a Border Policeman shot and killed the driver. Several people were injured in the attack, which resembled a deadly vehicle assault that took place in the city earlier this month.

"Today's bulldozer attack is a reminder of what Israelis have courageously lived with on a daily basis for far too long," Obama said.

Campaign aides said Obama intends to visit a southern Israeli town that is a frequent target of rockets fired by Palestinian militants in Gaza.

The stop in Sderot is part of a crowded day of events on Wednesday in which the Illinois senator has also arranged to meet with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah on the West Bank and with Israeli leaders.

Susan Rice, a foreign policy adviser, said Obama wanted to go to Sderot because "it is a place in which Israel's security is every day at risk and threatened. And Senator Obama will have the opportunity to see that first hand and get a very personal feel for the everyday difficulties." His schedule indicates he intends

to spend slightly more than an hour there.

Obama's trip to Iraq and Afghanistan was an official congressional trip, paid for with federal funds. The balance of his travels are financed by his presidential campaign.

Obama is working to shore up support among U.S. Jewish voters, many of whom supported Hillary Rodham Clinton in the battle for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, and some of whom have questioned his commitment to Israel.

Obama's schedule for Wednesday also includes a visit to Yad Vashem, the Israeli memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. Aides said a stop at the Western Wall, one of the holiest places in Judaism, was also a possibility.

In addition to Abbas, Obama's meeting list for the day includes Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and members of his Cabinet as well as Benjamin Netanyahu, head of the opposition Likud party and a former prime minister.

In his news conference, Obama alluded to the internal domestic problems facing Olmert, who is facing allegations of corruption, and the political schism among Palestinians.

"One of the difficulties that we have right now is that in order to make those compromises you have to have strong support from your people, and the Israeli government right now is unsettled," he said. "You know, the Palestinians are divided between Fatah and Hamas."

He compared the existing circumstances with those that permitted Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to sign a peace treaty in 1979.

"Those leaders were in a much stronger position to initiate that kind of peace," Obama said.

Palestinian Wounded In Northern Gaza

Media Outlet: Kuwait News Agency (kuna)

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): <http://www.kuna.net.kw/newsagenciespublicsite/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1926841&Lan...> [4]

A Palestinian youth was wounded here on Wednesday after being shot by the Israeli forces, who were firing from the northern part of the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian medical sources stated that the Israeli forces shot a group of Palestinians north of Beit Hanoun, resulting in wounding Mohammad Hamdan in the leg.

He was taken to Beit Hanoun Hospital for treatment.

Abbas Serious About Withdrawing Forces From Nablus ? Erekat

Media Outlet: Kuwait News Agency (kuna)

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): <http://www.kuna.net.kw/newsagenciespublicsite/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1926776&Lan...> [5]

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is serious about withdrawing Palestinian forces from Nablus if Israel does not stop executing incursions into the city, a Palestinian official said Wednesday. Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat told the Voice of Palestine radio station that the Palestinians would not allow the continuation of incursions into Palestinian cities, especially Nablus, adding that that was to the disdain of the Palestinian authority.

Israel Army forces have executed incursions into Nablus many times over the past two weeks. On Monday, it arrested 26 people, including Member of the Legislative Council Mona Mansour.

Israeli forces broke into and damaged mosques, schools, shops, charity and humanitarian organizations, and a large number of homes.

Meanwhile, Erekat announced that Abbas would not be meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on Thursday, pointing out that the talks would instead be held during the first week of August.

Barghouthi Spins Highlights Faults In Mideast Media

Article Author(s): Rachelle Kliger

Media Outlet: The Media Line

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): http://www.themedialine.org/news/news_detail.asp?NewsID=22192 [6]

Contradictory reports in the Israeli and Palestinian media are placing question marks over the reliability of the Middle Eastern media.

Reports are abounding regarding the inclusion of two senior jailed Palestinians in a possible deal to release Israel soldier Gilad Shalit from captivity in Gaza.

One is Marwan Barghouthi, a senior Fatah member, who is serving five consecutive life terms in an Israeli jail for his involvement in terrorism.

The other is Ahmad Sa'adat, who heads the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and who is in jail in connection with the assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Zeevi in 2001.

The London-based Al-Quds Al-'Arabi quoted Palestinian sources as saying that a prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hamas, brokered by Egypt, would include both Barghouthi and Sa'adat.

The Emirates-based Al-Bayan said Sa'adat's release was still being considered, and the London-based Al-Hayyat quoted a 'reliable Egyptian source' as saying Israel had agreed to release Barghouthi, or Sa'adat.

Israel is not confirming the reports.

A separate report in the Palestinian Ma'an News Agency said Palestinians had found a projectile south of Nablus and accused Israelis in post-1967 Jewish communities of firing rockets onto their communities.

Israel denied these rockets had been fired by Israelis.

But beyond the veracity of the reports themselves, the explosion of information and often-conflicting reports in the Middle East media sometimes confuse the media consumers more than informing them.

The Israeli media and the Palestinian media are very different and are by no way symmetrical, says Yizhar Be'er, executive director of the Keshev Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel.

The Palestinian media tend to be less independent and are often politically aligned, Be'er explains.

“The Israeli media are more professional, freer and more pluralistic and have no formal censorship except for specific security matters,” Be'er says.

“But there are gaps between the information that the reporters send and the end result after the editorial work. We see the editors frame the reports in a way that highlights the responsibility of the Palestinians and downplays the Israeli responsibility. The main narrative is that the other side is to blame for the situation we're in.”

Be'er is of the opinion that there is no such thing as objective media. This is especially pertinent to the Middle East, where the Israeli-Arab conflict has too many emotional, nationalistic and religious elements for the media to maintain neutrality.

Ruham Nimri, coordinator of the media-monitoring unit at the Palestinian Miftah organization, says the Palestinian media are still taking baby steps and have not reached a decent level of professionalism.

“The problem with the Palestinian media is that they don't have their own reporting,” Nimri says. “What you read in the Palestinian papers is news taken from Israeli sources and international agencies, so there's nothing much new when you read a Palestinian newspaper.”

The pan-Arab papers, such as those based in London, tend to be more reliable and serious, Nimri says.

Regarding the conflicting reports on Barghouti, Be'er says he does not think anyone really knows what is happening.

“There are a lot of media spins all the time. When you don't really know the facts you write what you want.”

Because of the fierce competition in the media today, no media outlet can afford not to write anything and lag behind. This is causing the quality of the media to deteriorate and is making them more sensational, more tabloid and more entertainment-oriented, Be'er believes.

The Arab media, and especially outlets that are national and not pan-Arab, have a propensity to quote unnamed sources, a fact that makes the reports more difficult to verify.

Nimri says this tendency is much more prevalent in country-based media, rather than pan-Arab outlets.

“It's different being a media outlet in Syria and being in London,” he says.

Journalism in the Middle East in terms of its professionalism and independence stands somewhere between Western journalism and the mouthpiece journalism prevalent in the Communist era, he explains.

?There are signs of journalistic work, but there is still a big gap between free media in the West and the Arab media,? Be?er says.

'to Hell With The Ceasefire' If Israel Doesn't Let Up, Hamas Says

Article Author(s): Mel Frykberg

Media Outlet: Middle East Times

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): http://www.metimes.com/International/2008/07/22/to_hell_with_the_ceasefire_if_is... [7]

In an unusual display of frustration, moderate Hamas official Ahmed Yousef, the adviser on foreign affairs to de-facto Gaza prime minister and Hamas leader Ismail Haniya, has told the Middle East Times that Hamas' patience with Israel is wearing thin.

"I don't know what game the Israelis are playing but quite frankly if the siege isn't lifted and Gaza's borders remain closed, the ceasefire can go to hell, Yousef said by phone.

Although Israel has opened Gaza's borders intermittently, following the announcement of the ceasefire and allowed a trickle of goods through, the territory remains virtually sealed.

This has exacerbated the chronic humanitarian conditions on the ground due to shortages of fuel, food, medicines and construction material.

Furthermore, vital spare parts for machinery needed to keep the strip's infrastructure working, such as water and waste management plants, are not able to be replaced or repaired.

Israel said it had re-closed the crossings following a number of missile attacks from Gaza in violation of the painstakingly negotiated ceasefire that involved a lot of patience on behalf of Egypt, which acted as an arbitrator between the Jewish state and the Islamic resistance movement.

The Qassam rocket attacks were themselves in response to Israeli violations which included a number of shootings at Gazan farmers and other Palestinian civilians, according to the United Nations, whom Israel claimed got too close to the border fence.

These shootings resulted in the serious injury of several civilians and the death of a militant.

Islamic Jihad was responsible for the first barrage of rockets fired at Israel after the start of the truce. This followed a provocative raid by Israeli soldiers in the West Bank which left one Hamas and one Islamic Jihad fighter dead, gunned down at close range according to media reports.

The last volley of missiles aimed at Israel was shot by The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, an offshoot of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement.

"The shooting of Qassams into Israel only took place at the beginning of the truce. Since then we have arrested some resistance fighters for either breaking or attempting to break the truce," Yousef said.

"Additionally the Israelis have violated the truce themselves on a number of occasions and they are not allowing in sufficient goods. It does not appear to me that Israel is seriously committed to the halting of

hostilities," he said.

"People don't see any of the fruits resulting from the ceasefire and their patience can only last so long," Yousef told the Middle East Times.

An editorial in the influential Israeli daily Haaretz reasoned that it was important to "distinguish between the aims that were set and the ability to fulfill all of them at once.

"When Israel decided to sign the ceasefire agreement with Hamas and the other Palestinian organizations, the working assumption was that those organizations would honor their commitment and compel other splinter organizations to keep the same commitment, even by force.

"Hamas has kept its commitment thus far. The Hamas mufti has called anyone who fires a Qassam a 'criminal' and its leadership is declaring that the Qassams damage Palestinian interests," added the editorial.

Both Hamas and Israel have a great interest in maintaining the ceasefire, even though there are criminal gangs, and elements within rival Fatah ? which is still smarting following its military defeat by Hamas forces in Gaza last year ? to torpedo the agreement in an effort to both undermine and embarrass Hamas.

Even though Israel could claim that any elements in Gaza breaking the ceasefire are the problem of Hamas alone, Israeli security would have been aware from the beginning of the difficulties facing the Islamic resistance organization.

The Middle East Times put it to Yousef that perhaps Israel's continued closure of the borders, through which the desperately needed humanitarian aid is delivered, could be a means of pressuring the guerilla group into showing more flexibility in regard to the stalled prisoner swap.

The Israeli government is under renewed pressure, especially in light of the recent prisoner swap with Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, to secure the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit who was captured by Gazan resistance fighters over two years ago and remains in captivity today.

Yousef wouldn't confirm that there was a direct connection between the two issues but reaffirmed to this newspaper that Israel's refusal to release 450 core prisoners, whom the Israelis contend "have blood on their hands" was, in his opinion, and that of Hamas, unacceptable.

However, Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri drew a direct connection.

"Hamas has decided to suspend negotiations for the release of Shalit because of the closure," he said.

Another round of talks on freeing Shalit in return for the freeing of some of the more than 10,000 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, many without being brought to trial, was meant to have taken place last Saturday in Cairo.

But unless either side is willing to show more flexibility, or a weary and wary Egypt can breathe new life into the deal, it appears this particular chapter of Israel's prisoner swap story is not about to have the same successful outcome that its prisoner swap with Hezbollah did.

Youths Injure Two Arabs In Jerusalem Assault

Media Outlet: The Jerusalem Post

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1215331061642&pagename=JPost%2FJPArti...>

[8]

Several hours after Tuesday's terror attack in Jerusalem, a group of youths assaulted two east Jerusalem residents, Army Radio reported.

The incident occurred in the Makor Baruch neighborhood, home to both Orthodox learning institutions, and hardware stores and other such outlets that draw many Arab shoppers and employees.

According to eyewitnesses, two battered and bleeding Arabs barged into the yard of a family sitting shiva (the seven-day Jewish mourning period), followed by a mob of furious yeshiva students.

The family of the house protected the two men and repelled the mob.

One member of the family said students had yelled at him from the balcony of the yeshiva, which overlooks the house, calling to "kill Jews who protect Arabs."

The two east Jerusalem residents were taken to the capital's Hadassah-University Hospital for treatment.

The family that protected them remained mostly unscathed, but one of them was also attacked.

"They would have killed me if they could have," he said.

He said the two men had told him that the altercation began after an argument they had with a store owner drew some bystanders who intervened and started beating the Arabs.

Waiting for the commotion to subside, the man and his son led the Arab men to an alleyway so they could escape.

But then, the man recounted, hundreds of yeshiva students stormed after the two, beating them "to a pulp." Protecting them with his own body, he was confronted by two haredi men, one of whom was brandishing a 20-centimeter-long knife.

He was wounded in his abdomen, at which point the crowd began to disperse and police forces arrived.

"All hell broke loose. After the terror attack, the public's blood boiled, and people became hot-headed, insane. These people that call themselves religious almost killed me and the two Palestinians. I was raised to defend any person. Luckily for me, I'm strong, but [had I been stabbed] one centimeter above or below, this would have become a murder," the man said.

Rabbi Yitzhak Bazri of the nearby David Bazri yeshiva condemned the incident and said the mob had not come from his yeshiva.

"We only have older students, and the attackers were young," he said. "This is a serious incident; no one should hurt innocents, [either] Arab or Jewish. It's against Halacha. I hope they find the assailants and put them on trial."

A Peek Into Gaza's Underground Lifeline

Article Author(s): Ali Waked

Media Outlet: Ynetnews

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3572112,00.html> [9]

For the right price, residents can have almost any commodity smuggled into Gaza through elaborate tunnels. 'This is a full-fledged competitive business that requires maintenance,' source says

Ever since Hamas' violent takeover of Gaza in June 2006, the Strip's residents have had to rely on underground tunnels to smuggle in the most basic necessities, as well as cell phones and petrol from Egypt.

Over the past few months an entire industry emerged in which, for the right price, people can have almost any commodity smuggled into Gaza through elaborate tunnels.

The smuggling operation has not been slowed down despite the recent ceasefire between Israel and the armed Palestinian groups and the opening of some border crossings for the transfer of goods.

"The smuggling tunnels are far from being just holes in the ground," a source in Gaza told Ynet, "this is a full-fledged competitive business that requires maintenance."

According to the source, those wishing to smuggle in goods through elaborate tunnels pay more. "One of the more popular tunnels in Rafah spans nearly two kilometers (about 1.2 miles). Large amounts of goods, usually ordered by prominent merchants, are smuggled through it, and the smugglers sometimes have to remain inside the tunnel for as long as two days."

According to the source, the tunnel owner inserts three separate tubes containing oxygen, milk and water for the use of smugglers forced to stay underground for lengthy periods of time.

"The tunnels are chosen according to the quality of lighting, which is very high in the Rafah tunnel," he said. "Traders prefer to use a five-star tunnel even if the price is steep, because they know that in one big smuggling operation they can receive goods that will last them a long time."

According to the source, a ton of cement worth NIS 400 (\$117) can cost NIS 2,500 (\$732) to smuggle into the coastal enclave "because many people have to be paid off along the way.

"You have to pay smugglers to transfer the goods from Cairo to the Egyptian side of Rafah, which makes the deal more expensive," he said. "The goods coming in from Egypt are usually of very low quality."

Pa: Israel Pardoned Another 24 Wanted Fatah Men

Article Author(s): Ali Waked

Media Outlet: Ynetnews

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3571935,00.html> [10]

Israel has informed the Palestinian Authority that it is willing to pardon 24 wanted al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades' members as part of the prisoner release deal signed between both sides in 2007, Palestinian sources said Tuesday.

The decision was made following defense establishment assessments. Four of the men will be fully pardoned and would be able to move freely within Palestinian territories. The rest would be able to move freely within Palestinian Zone A and will no longer be included on Israel's most wanted list.

Ynet reported about six months ago that Israel and the PA were able to reach an agreement whereby hundreds of wanted Fatah men will begin a three-month probation period. Those who were to refrain from engaging in terror activity were to be pardoned according to the agreement and removed from Israel's most wanted lists.

The latest list of pardoned al-Aqsa Brigades members does not include any prominent names, but a Palestinian security official told Ynet that "despite the small number, we believe that in light of the prevailing conditions we should welcome the list and continue to move forward, so that the amnesty will include all wanted members of the organization."

"All of us are 100% committed to the agreement and to the orders of President Abbas," he said.

Polygraph Confirms Idf Officer Didn't Order Soldier To Shoot Cuffed Palestinian

Article Author(s): Yuval Azoulay And Shahar Ilan

Media Outlet: Haaretz

Date: July 23, 2008

Source Link(s): <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1004814.html> ^[11]

The Israel Defense Forces officer accused of ordering a soldier under his command to shoot a bound and blindfolded Palestinian detainee has passed a polygraph test verifying his testimony that he did not give the order to open fire.

Lieutenant colonel Omri Fruberg, commanding officer of IDF regiment 71, took the polygraph on Tuesday in a private institute at the recommendation of his lawyers.

The investigation began after the soldier, who was filmed shooting a Palestinian protester during a demonstration in the West Bank village of Na'alim, said he just been carrying out an order by Fruberg. In the video, Fruberg is shown holding the arm of the Palestinian, Ashraf Abu-Rahama, 27, while a soldier under his command opens fire at close range. Abu-Rahama sustained light wounds to his foot in the incident.

Fruberg will undergo a second polygraph test under the auspices of the military police on Wednesday afternoon.

The incident in Na'alim was filmed by a Palestinian girl from a window of her home and sent to military authorities by the Israeli human rights group BT'selem in early July.

The soldier was released from police detention on Tuesday and sent back to join his unit after telling investigators that his regiment commander had ordered him to fire.

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