U.S. Periods of War and Dates of Recent Conflicts

Updated February 5, 2024
Summary

Many wars or conflicts in U.S. history have federally designated “periods of war,” dates marking their beginning and ending. These dates are important for qualification for certain veterans’ pension or disability benefits. Confusion can occur because beginning and ending dates for “periods of war” in many nonofficial sources are often different from those given in treaties and other official sources of information, and armistice dates can be confused with termination dates. This report lists the beginning and ending dates for “periods of war” found in Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations, dealing with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It also lists and differentiates other beginning dates given in declarations of war, as well as termination of hostilities dates and armistice and ending dates given in proclamations, laws, or treaties. The dates for the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are included along with the official end date for Operation New Dawn in Iraq on December 15, 2011, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan on December 28, 2014, and Operation Freedom’s Sentinel on September 30, 2021. Operation Inherent Resolve continues along the Syrian-Iraqi border effective October 15, 2014. Operation Enduring Sentinel, initiated on October 1, 2021 to counter terrorist threats from Afghanistan, remains ongoing.

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War Dates

Congress, usually through a declaration of war, has often been the first governmental authority to designate the beginning date of a war or armed conflict. The President, or executive branch officials responsible to him, through proclamation, or Congress, through legislation, has been responsible for designating the war’s termination date. In some cases, later legislation is enacted to extend these beginning and ending dates for the purpose of broadening eligibility for veterans’ benefits. This report notes the variations in the dates cited in the Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) “periods of war” and those dates given in the declarations of war beginning and the proclamations, laws, or treaties terminating such conflicts. Adding to the confusion, during World War II, wars were declared and terminated with six individual combatant countries. Moreover, armistice dates are also often confused with termination dates.

Title 38, Part 3, Section 3.2 of the Code of Federal Regulations, dealing with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), lists official beginning and termination dates for most war periods from the Indian Wars to the present to be used in determining the availability of veterans’ benefits. The material below summarizes these dates. Where applicable, a summary of the Department of Veterans Affairs official beginning and termination dates is provided followed by a citation to the lettered C.F.R. section. For some entries, this initial summary is followed by an explanatory note or declaration, armistice, cease-fire, or termination dates cited by other official sources. Also included are dates for the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Indian Wars

January 1, 1817, through December 31, 1898, inclusive. Service must have been rendered with U.S. military forces against Indian tribes or nations. Code of Federal Regulations, 3.2 (a).

Spanish-American War

April 21, 1898, through July 4, 1902, inclusive. If the veteran served with the U.S. military forces engaged in hostilities in the Moro Province, the ending date is July 15, 1903. The Philippine


2 The American Legion also follows these dates closely in determining who is eligible for membership; the Veterans of Foreign Wars has its own much more elaborate list of dates.


5 Title 38 of the C.F.R., titled “Pensions, Bonuses and Veterans’ Relief,” is not to be confused with Title 38 of the United States Code, titled “Veterans Benefits.” Laws enacted in each Congress are first collected as session laws, published in the Statutes at Large for each session. These laws are then codified by subject and published in the United States Code. The general guidance given by these laws results in the issuance of more detailed regulations to implement these laws. Such regulations are first published in the Federal Register and are then codified by subject in the C.F.R.
Insurrection and the Boxer Rebellion are included for the purposes of benefit determination under this C.F.R. section. *Code of Federal Regulations*, 3.2 (b).


**Mexican Border Period**

May 9, 1916, through April 5, 1917. In the case of a veteran who during such period served in Mexico, on the borders thereof, or in the adjacent waters thereto. *Code of Federal Regulations*, 3.2 (h).

**World War I**

April 6, 1917, through November 11, 1918, inclusive. If the veteran served with the U.S. military forces in Russia, the ending date is April 1, 1920. Service after November 11, 1918, and before July 2, 1921, is considered World War I service if the veteran served in the active military, naval, or air service after April 5, 1917, and before November 12, 1918. *Code of Federal Regulations*, 3.2 (c).

**World War I against Germany**


**World War I against Austria-Hungary**


**World War II**

December 7, 1941, through December 31, 1946, inclusive. If the veteran was in service on December 31, 1946, continuous service before July 26, 1947, is considered World War II service. *Code of Federal Regulations*, 3.2 (d).

During World War II, war was officially declared against six separate countries. The war with each was not over until the effective date of the Treaty of Peace. Note also the confusion cited below over which day is the official Victory in Europe Day (V-E Day)\(^6\) and Victory over Japan (V-J Day).\(^6\)

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Day (V-J Day).  

**World War II with Germany**

Declared by Joint Resolution of Congress, December 11, 1941 (55 Stat. 796, Ch. 564). German representative Colonel General Alfred Jodl signed the unconditional act of surrender to Allied representatives in a schoolhouse in Reims, France, on May 7, 1945. A second German surrender ceremony was held on May 8 in Berlin at the insistence of the U.S.S.R. Cessation of hostilities declared as of noon, December 31, 1946, by presidential proclamation of December 31, 1946 (Proc. no. 2714, 61 Stat. 1048). State of war with the “government of Germany” terminated October 19, 1951, by Joint Resolution of Congress of that date (65 Stat. 451, Ch. 519), by Presidential Proclamation 2950, October 24, 1951. No peace treaty with Germany was signed.

**World War II with Japan**


**World War II with Italy**


**World War II with Bulgaria**

Declared by Joint Resolution of Congress, June 5, 1942 (56 Stat. 307, Ch. 323). Cessation of hostilities declared as of noon December 31, 1946, by presidential proclamation of December 31,

**World War II with Hungary**


**World War II with Romania**


**Korean Conflict**


On June 25, 1950, North Korean Communist forces attacked South Korean positions south of the 38th parallel, leading to an immediate United Nations (U.N.) Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire and withdrawal of the North Korean forces. On June 26, President Truman ordered U.S. air and sea forces in the Far East to aid South Korea. On June 27, the U.N. Security Council adopted a resolution asking U.N. members for assistance in repelling the North Korean armed attack and in restoring peace and security in the area. On June 30, the President stated that he had authorized the use of certain U.S. air and ground units wherever necessary. No declaration of war was requested of Congress and no authorization for use of force, by statute, was requested or enacted. An armistice signed at Panmunjom, Korea, on July 27, 1953, between U.N. and Communist representatives (4 UST 234; TIAS 2782). No peace treaty was ever signed.

**Vietnam Era**


**Tonkin Gulf Resolution**

No declaration of war was requested of Congress. Instead, there was a Joint Resolution of Congress to promote the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia, which stated in part that Congress “approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent any further aggression.” H.J. Res. 1145, P.L. 88-408, August 10, 1964 (78 Stat. 384). The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was formally repealed on January 12, 1971, by P.L. 91-672, (84 Stat. 2055). The Agreement Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam signed in Paris, January 27, 1973 (TIAS 7674). Joint communiqué implementing the agreement and protocols of January 27, 1973, signed at Paris and entered into force, June 13, 1973.


Grenada. On October 25, 1983, U.S. troops were deployed to Grenada “to restore law and order” and to protect American lives at the request of the members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. Known as Operation Urgent Fury, 9 by December 15, 1983, all forces were withdrawn.

Panama. On December 21, 1989, President George H.W. Bush reported that he had ordered U.S. military forces to Panama to protect the lives of American citizens and bring General Noriega to justice. Known as Operation Just Cause, 10 by February 13, 1990, all U.S. forces were withdrawn.

Participation in these conflicts alone does not confer automatic veterans’ status for servicemembers. For more information, see CRS Report R47299, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Who Is a Veteran?, by Scott D. Szymendera, and CRS Report RL31133, Declarations of War and Authorizations for the Use of Military Force: Historical Background and Legal Implications, by Jennifer K. Elsea and Matthew C. Weed.

Persian Gulf War

August 2, 1990, through April 6, 1991, when Iraq officially accepted cease-fire terms. Congress passed H.J.Res. 77, Authorizing the Use of Military Force against Iraq, the same day it was introduced (January 12, 1991), and it was signed by President George H.W. Bush on January 14, 1991 (P.L. 102-1). Operation Desert Storm 11 and the air war phase began at 3 a.m. January 17, 1991 (January 16, 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time). Allied ground assault began at 4 a.m. February 24 (February 23, 8 p.m. EST). Cease-fire declared at 8:01 a.m. February 28, 1991 (12:01 a.m. EST). 12 Cease-fire terms negotiated at Safwan, Iraq, March 1, 1991. 13 Iraq officially accepted

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8 See also S.J.Res. 159 (P.L. 98-119) authorizing the President to keep U.S. forces in Lebanon for as long as 18 months, or until April 1985; and “A Reluctant Congress Adopts Lebanon Policy,” CQ Almanac 1983 at https://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/document.php?id=cqal83-1198422.  
12 Cease fire— “A command given to any unit or individual firing any weapon to stop engaging the target.” Department of Defense Dictionary, p. 67.  
Recent Conflicts: Afghanistan and Iraq

Shortly after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush called on Afghanistan’s leaders to hand over Osama bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders and close their terrorist training camps. He also demanded the return of all detained foreign nationals and the opening of terrorist training sites to inspection. These demands were rejected. The Administration sought international support from the United Nations for military action against Afghanistan. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1368 of September 12, 2001, stated that the Council “expresses its readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001...” This resolution was interpreted by many as U.N. authorization for military action in response to the 9/11 attacks. As a result, Congress passed S.J.Res. 23, “Authorization for Use of Military Force,” on September 14, 2001. This bill was signed by President George W. Bush on September 18, 2001, as P.L. 107-40, and it authorized the President to use “all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons....” Operations in the region began with U.S. military forces deployed to the region on October 7, 2001.

Afghanistan—Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)

Operations began with U.S. military forces deployed to Afghanistan to combat terrorism on October 7, 2001, and designated Operation Enduring Freedom.

On March 27, 2009, President Barack Obama announced a new strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan and ordered the deployment of 17,000 troops that had been previously requested by General David McKiernan. In President Obama’s “Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan” at West Point on December 1, 2009, he stated that “it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home. These are the resources that we need to seize the initiative, while...
building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.”

On June 22, 2011, President Obama again addressed the American people about the way forward in Afghanistan: “We will begin the drawdown of U.S. troops from a position of strength. We have exceeded our expectations on our core goal of defeating al-Qaeda killing 20 of its top 30 leaders, including Osama bin Laden. We have broken the Taliban’s momentum, and trained over 100,000 Afghan National Security Forces.” As a result, U.S. forces began the withdrawal of 10,000 troops from Afghanistan.

On December 28, 2014, after 13 years of combat operations, President Obama and Secretary of Defense Hagel announced the end of OEF and the beginning of a follow-on mission on January 1, 2015. A transition ceremony was held at the International Security and Assistance Force headquarters in Kabul, Afghanistan, attended by U.S. commanders and allied troops from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Afghanistan—Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS)

Effective January 1, 2015, Secretary of Defense Hagel announced that the U.S. mission in Afghanistan would focus on training, advising, and assisting Afghan security forces and designated it as Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. During 2015, approximately 13,000 troops, with nearly 10,000 from the United States, were deployed from 41 nations to begin NATO’s Resolute Support Mission (RSM). RSM focused on training, advising, and assisting (TAA) the Afghan Security Institutions (ASI) and the Afghan National Defense & Security Forces (ANDSF) in order to build their capabilities and long-term sustainability. On October 1, 2015, General John F. Campbell, commander, RSM, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan/ISAF, defined the U.S. military’s objectives: “U.S. forces are now carrying out two well-defined missions: a Counter-Terrorism

25 NATO, Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, May 30, 2022, at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_113694.htm. At the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, Allied leaders decided to extend the presence of RSM beyond 2016. Two years later, at the Brussels Summit in July 2018, they committed to sustaining the mission until conditions indicate a change is appropriate. In February 2020, the U.S. and the Taliban agreed to the withdrawal of international forces by May 2021. In April 2021, the NATO Allies decided to begin the withdrawal of RSM forces by May 1, 2021. The RSM was terminated in September 2021. For information on the U.S.-Taliban agreement, see CRS Report R46879, U.S. Military Withdrawal and Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan: Frequently Asked Questions, coordinated by Clayton Thomas; and CRS Report R45122, Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy, by Clayton Thomas.
(CT) mission against the remnants of Al-Qaeda and the Resolute Support TAA mission in support of Afghan security forces. Our CT and TAA efforts are concurrent and complementary. While we continue to attack the remnants of Al-Qaeda, we are also building the ANDSF so that they can secure the Afghan people, win the peace, and contribute to stability throughout the region.”

On October 15, 2015, President Obama announced that the posture of 9,800 U.S. troops in Afghanistan would remain through 2016. By the end of 2016, 5,500 troops were expected to remain in Afghanistan to support the U.S. embassy in Kabul and at bases in Bagram, Jalalabad, and Kandahar to train Afghans and focus on counterterrorism operations in the region.

On August 21, 2017, President Donald Trump announced his strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia in a speech at Fort Myer, VA. He stated, “In Afghanistan and Pakistan, America’s interests are clear: We must stop the resurgence of safe havens that enable terrorists to threaten America, and we must prevent nuclear weapons and materials from coming into the hands of terrorists and being used against us, or anywhere in the world for that matter.”

On September 2, 2018, Army General John M. Nicholson passed command of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission and U.S. Forces Afghanistan to Army General Austin S. Miller during a ceremony in Kabul, Afghanistan. General Miller emphasized to coalition troops that what they are doing in Afghanistan makes their own countries and citizens safer. The “train, advise, assist” mission allows Afghan security forces to take the fight to the enemy, and to give the Afghan government the security needed to provide stability and no longer a safe haven for terrorists.

In February 2020, the Trump Administration announced that the United States had entered into an agreement with the Taliban “that secures important commitments that are necessary to finally end the conflict in Afghanistan.” Per the agreement, which was signed on February 29, 2020, the United States committed to the withdrawal of “all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel” from Afghanistan by the end of April 2021.

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On April 14, 2021, President Biden announced his intent to uphold the agreement signed under the Trump Administration. He stated that the final withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan would begin on May 1, 2021 and end by September 11, 2021.33

On August 30, 2021, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced that the evacuation of civilians and the removal of all U.S. forces from Afghanistan was complete, marking the end of OFS and the war in Afghanistan.34 Marine Corps General Frank McKenzie, the head of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), confirmed the end of the evacuation and the war with the departure of the last military planes. The final C-17 left Kabul on August 30, 2021, at 3:29 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time.35 OFS was terminated on September 30, 2021.36

The war in Afghanistan spanned nearly two decades and DOD reports that it claimed the lives of 2,463 U.S. servicemembers and civilians.37

**Afghanistan—Operation Enduring Sentinel (OES)**

After the conclusion of OFS in September 2021, Operation Enduring Sentinel began on October 1, 2021, “as the new U.S. mission to counter terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan.”38 OES also aims to promote regional stability through increased counterterrorism and security assistance engagement with regional partners in Central and South Asia.39 Following the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2021, terrorist organizations including ISIS-
Khorasan (ISIS-K)\(^{40}\) and Al-Qaeda “have sought to exploit the reduction of U.S. counterterrorism efforts to increase their ability to plot and direct external attacks.”\(^{41}\)

The OES mission is under the jurisdiction of USCENTOM and is also supported by the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).\(^{42}\) In contrast to OFS, OES is conducted from locations outside of Afghanistan, referred to as “over the horizon” locations.\(^{43}\) Operations are conducted by the joint headquarters in Qatar.\(^{44}\) According to USCENTCOM, as of 2022, the headquarters was staffed by about 100 personnel.\(^{45}\)

The DOD Office of the Inspector General (OIG) submits quarterly reports to Congress detailing events involving OES. The latest DOD OIG report available at the time of this report’s publication date covers the period between July 1, 2023-September 30, 2023. The report did not include any publicly available information from DOD about U.S. military activity for OES for this quarter.\(^{46}\) Regarding terrorist activity in the region, the report noted that violent extremism continued to pose a security threat in Afghanistan. Estimates from the Defense Intelligence Agency include the following numbers of fighters from violent extremist organizations in Afghanistan: 4,000 to 6,000 for Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan, 2,000 for ISIS-K, 200 for Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, and “fewer than a dozen core members” for Al-Qaeda.\(^{47}\) As of September 2023, Al-Qaeda was reported to be “at an historical low point” in Afghanistan and Pakistan.\(^{48}\)

**Iraq—Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)**

In mid-2002, the George W. Bush Administration began deploying U.S. troops to Kuwait. During the 107\(^{th}\) Congress (2001-2002), Congress debated whether to send U.S. troops to Iraq, and on October 16, 2002, H.J.Res. 114 was signed into law as P.L. 107-243, Authorization for the Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002. This law authorized the President to use military force to “defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq” and “to enforce all relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions against Iraq.”\(^{49}\)

\(^{40}\) ISIS-K is the Afghan branch of the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIL, ISIS, or the Arabic acronym Da’esh). For background information on ISIS, see CRS In Focus IF10328, *The Islamic State*, by Clayton Thomas.


\(^{42}\) Ibid.


\(^{45}\) Ibid.


\(^{47}\) Ibid, p. 6.

\(^{48}\) Ibid, p. 2.

On November 8, 2002, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1441. This resolution found Iraq in breach of past U.N. resolutions prohibiting stockpiling and importing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). The Hussein government in Iraq continued to be uncooperative with U.N. investigators, which heightened the situation through spring 2003.

In an address to the nation on March 17, 2003, President George W. Bush gave Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his sons a 48-hour ultimatum to leave Iraq. On March 19, 2003, President Bush announced to the nation that the early stages of military operations against Iraq had begun and designated them Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

On May 1, 2003, in an address to the nation, President Bush declared that “major military combat actions in Iraq have ended,” yet U.S. troops remained in Iraq.

A ceremony at Camp Victory in Baghdad on January 1, 2010, marked the end of the Multinational Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) and the beginning of United States Forces-Iraq (USF-I), which merged five major command groups into one single headquarters command. As General David Petraeus, head of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), noted, “This ceremony marks another significant transition here in Iraq. It represents another important milestone in the continued drawdown of American Forces.” Troops from 30 countries have served in MNF-I since 2003.

On August 31, 2010, President Obama announced that the American combat mission in Iraq had ended. A transitional force of U.S. troops remained in Iraq with a different mission: advising and assisting Iraq’s security forces, supporting Iraqi troops in targeted counterterrorism missions, and protecting U.S. civilians.

On May 16, 2023, President Joseph R. Biden Jr., issued a Notice—Continuation of the National Emergency with Respect to the Stabilization of Iraq: “[I]n accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency with respect to the stabilization of Iraq declared in Executive Order 13303. This notice shall be published in the Federal Register and transmitted to the Congress.”

Iraq—Operation New Dawn (OND)

Effective September 1, 2010, the military operations in Iraq acquired a new official designation: Operation New Dawn. A short ceremony marked the transfer in which Army General Ray

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52 Ibid, pp. 342-343.
55 Ibid.
Odierno passed command of USF-I to Army General Lloyd J. Austin. On December 15, 2011, U.S. Armed Forces in Baghdad marked the official end of the war in Iraq. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other top U.S. military leaders observed the official end of U.S. Forces Iraq’s mission after nearly nine years of conflict that claimed the lives of nearly 4,500 U.S. troops.59 On the military side of Baghdad International Airport, Army General Martin E. Dempsey, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, Army General Lloyd J. Austin III, commanding general of U.S. Forces Iraq, and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq James F. Jeffrey addressed U.S. and Iraqi officials and more than 150 troops and media from around the world.60

For more information, see CRS Report R45025, *Iraq: Background and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

**Islamic State-Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR)**

On October 15, 2014, the DOD announced the designation of U.S. and coalition operations “Operation Inherent Resolve”61 against the terrorist group the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, another name for the Islamic State or the Arabic acronym Da’esh) along the Syrian-Iraqi border. The commander of U.S. 3rd Army and Army Forces Central Command was designated the commanding officer of the Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) effective October 17, 2014.62 As of June 30, 2017, the total cost of operations related to ISIS since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, was $14.3 billion and the average daily cost is $13.6 million for 1,058 days of operations.63 Between 2017 and 2020, CJTF-OIR led air strikes “in support of decisive battles” against ISIL.64 By March 23, 2019, ISIL had lost control of all physical territory and was “reduced to an underground organization.”65 In 2020, CJTF-OIR reported that OIR transitioned from “training and assisting to advising and enabling” Iraqi and Syrian partner forces.66 Despite the loss of physical territory, ISIL fighters continued to maintain a presence in both countries and pose a potential terrorist threat.67 As of September 2023, CJTF-OIR continues to support the mission of OIR by providing “security, planning, and support to the Iraqi government and appropriate authorities in Syria.”68

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60 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
According to the Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress on Operation Inherent Resolve for the period between July 2023 and September 2023, “ISIL capabilities remained degraded in Iraq and Syria as [ISIL] continued to lose leaders and maintained a survival posture.” Per CJTF-OIR, ISIL claimed 41 attacks in Iraq and Syria during this period. When compared to the same quarter in 2022, this represents a 72% decrease in attacks.69

For more information, see CRS In Focus IF10328, The Islamic State, by Clayton Thomas and CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10391, UPDATED: Recent U.S. Airstrikes: Legal Authorities and Questions, by Steve P. Mulligan and Jennifer K. Elsea.

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