VIET-NAM
INFORMATION NOTES
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WHY WE FIGHT IN VIET-NAM

THERE WOULD BE NO WAR TODAY IF NORTH VIET-NAM HAD KEPT ITS PLEDGE

The paramount fact about the war in Viet-Nam is this:

If there had been no violation by North Viet-Nam of article 10 of the Geneva agreement, calling for total cessation of hostilities, there would be no war in Viet-Nam today.

The keystone of the 1954 Geneva Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam is article 10, which provides that the commanders of forces on each side "shall order and enforce the complete cessation of all hostilities in Viet-Nam by all armed forces under their control, including all units and personnel of the ground, naval and air forces."

Hostilities ceased in the North, but they never fully ceased in the South. The Communist North organized, directed, and supplied armed forces operating against the South, forcing the Government of South Viet-Nam to seek help in taking defensive measures. The Communist North, denying its responsibility for the attacks in the South, despite conclusive proof to the contrary, complained to the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Viet-Nam (ICC) that the South's defensive measures constituted a violation of the Geneva agreement.

Behind this smokescreen the aggression against the South was rapidly escalated.

Hanoi, denying its responsibility for attacks in the south despite conclusive proof to the contrary, complained that the South's defensive measures constituted a violation of the Geneva agreement.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FROM 1954

The end of the French colonial era in Indochina came with the signing of the Geneva accords in July 1954. Representatives of Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of (North) Viet-Nam, France, Laos, Communist China, the State of (South) Viet-Nam, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States met in Geneva and brought the long struggle between the forces of the French Union and the Communist-led Viet Minh and its allies to an end.

Four documents were produced: three agreements on the cessation of hostilities in Cambodia, Laos, and Viet-Nam; and one overall unsigned final declaration of the conference. The three agreements on the cessation of hostilities were signed on behalf of the commanders of the military forces opposing each other, the Vice Minister of Defense of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam signing in each case for the Communist-led forces.

Unsupervised Elections Provision Rejected by United States, South Viet-Nam

In addition, two unilateral declarations were issued:

•In one, the representative of the State of Viet-Nam stated his government's unwillingness to be bound by any agreement between the other parties concerning the political future of the people of South Viet-Nam. Tran Van Do, the esteemed statesman then representing the State of Viet-Nam, protested that others had arrogated to themselves "the right, without prior agreement from the delegation of the State of Viet-Nam, to fix the date of the future elections despite the clearly political character of such a provision."

In his declaration to the conference Tran Van Do said:

"The delegation of the State of Viet Nam has put forward its proposals aimed at obtaining an armistice without partition, even temporary, of Viet Nam, by means of the disarmament of all the belligerent forces after their withdrawal into assembly areas as restricted as possible, and by the establishment of temporary control by the United Nations Organization over the whole of the territory until such time as the restoration of order and peace permits the Vietnamese people to decide its future by free election.

"The Vietnamese delegation. . .protests solemnly against the hasty conclusion of the armistice agreement by the French and Viet Minh (Communist) High Commands alone, in view of the fact that the French High Command only commands Vietnamese troops by delegation of the powers of the Chief of State of Viet Nam, and above all in view of the fact that several clauses of this agreement are of a nature to compromise gravely the political future of the Vietnamese people. . . .

"Consequently, the Government of the State of Viet Nam demands that it should be put on record that it protests solemnly against the way in which the armistice was concluded and against the conditions of this armistice, which takes no account of the profound aspirations of the Vietnamese people, and that it reserves complete freedom of action for safeguarding the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to territorial unity, independence, and freedom."

•In the other, the United States through its representative, Under Secretary Walter Bedell Smith, declared the United States unwillingness to join in the declaration of the conference. He repeated the U.S. position on free elections, saying:

"In the case of nations now divided against their will, we shall continue to seek to achieve unity through free elections supervised by the United Nations to insure that they are conducted fairly.

"With respect to the statement made by the representative of the State of Viet-Nam, the United States reiterates its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future and that it will not join in an arrangement which would hinder this."

The reason for the protest of the United States and the State of Viet-Nam was simple: Unless the proposed elections were held under U.N. supervision with full freedom of opposition, secret ballots, and impartial counting of the ballots, the people of South Viet-Nam, whatever their feelings might be, would be totally at the mercy of Communist government in the North. For in North Viet-Nam, the Communists held under absolute control slightly more than half the Vietnamese population.

As for the agreements reached between the other parties, Under Secretary Smith stated that the policy of the United States would be to refrain from force or the threat of force to disturb those agreements, and that the United States would view any renewal of aggression in violation of the agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security.

Neither the United States nor the State of Viet-Nam associated itself with the final declaration.

After the Conference an Exodus from the North

With regard to Viet-Nam, the Geneva agreement called for an end to all hostilities, provided for provisional division of the country at the 17th parallel, and for the withdrawal of the opposing forces into the two zones thus created, and gave over the civil administration of the two zones to the two parties withdrawing into them.

While the Communists quickly and ruthlessly consolidated their control of the North, the turmoil in the South was compounded by the need to accept a million refugees from the North into the South and by the withdrawal of the military forces of the French.

Prime Minister (later President) Ngo Dinh Diem, initially had to administer a nation whose economy was ruined, and whose political life was fragmented by rivalries of religious sects and powerful political factions. He was able during the next 9 years to eliminate the entrenched private armies of the sects; form a small, unified national army; and, with U.S. aid, make progress toward reconstructing the economy.

U.S. Assistance Since 1950

Support for the South-Vietnamese Government in the form of economic, technical, and

military assistance had been provided by the United States since 1950. After the Geneva accords, the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) became the only outside source of military aid for the South Vietnamese Armed Forces. While the armed forces available to protect South Viet-Nam were greatly reduced when French Union Forces were dismantled following the Geneva conference, the North Vietnamese quickly built their army from seven to 20 divisions with supplies obtained from Communist powers.

SEATO

The United States, France, Great Britain, Thailand, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines signed the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty (SEATO) on September 8, 1954. A protocol to that treaty included Laos, Cambodia, and South Viet-Nam under articles III and IV of the treaty which among other things provides for economic and military assistance, the latter in case of armed attack or indirect attack and only at the invitation or with the consent of the government concerned. The SEATO treaty reinforced the position taken by the United States earlier the same year at the Geneva conference that we would view any renewal of aggression in violation of the Geneva accords as a serious threat to international peace and security.

Assistance Program Developments Under Three Administrations

President Eisenhower on October 1, 1954, in a letter to the President of Viet-Nam, stated that the policy behind U.S. aid was "to assist the Government of Viet-Nam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means."

Following 5 years of clandestine preparation and activity, in 1959 Communists in the North came into the open with their calculated program of aggression against the people of the South. The Lao Dong (Communist) Party in Hanoi announced that the time had come to "liberate" the South. Over the next few years the aggression developed steadily and in 1962 brought the condemnation of the International Control Commission (see below).

In 1962 President Kennedy, at the request of the South Vietnamese Government, established the United States Military Assistance Command, sustained by modern airpower and antiguerrilla special forces.

Two days after the death of President Kennedy, in 1963, President Johnson reaffirmed the U.S. intention to continue its military and economic support of South Viet-Nam's struggle against aggression from the North.

U. S. Destroyers Attacked

On August 2 and 4, 1964, U.S. destroyers were attacked in international waters off the Vietnamese coast by North Viet-Nam torpedo boats. In the same period, intelligence was accumulating which proved the presence of regular North Vietnamese battle units in South Viet-Nam. The aggression had moved to a new stage of outright military invasion.

In a message to Congress on August 5, 1964, the President asked for a resolution "expressing the unity and determination of the United States in supporting freedom and in protecting peace in Southeast Asia." In its resolution approved on August 7 by a vote of 88-2 and 416-0 in the Senate and House of Representatives respectively, the Congress declared the United States was "prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assitance in defense of its freedom."

"Why Are We There?"

In the following months it became obvious that a greater U.S. military effort was required if South Viet-Nam was to be saved. In his State of the Union message on January 5, 1965, President Johnson said:

"Why are we there? We are there, first because a friendly nation asked us for help against Communist aggression. Ten years ago we pledged our help. Three Presidents have supported that pledge. We will not break it.... Our goal is peace in Southeast Asia. That will come only when aggressors leave their neighbors in peace."

AGGRESSION BY NORTH VIET-NAM INVESTIGATED AND VERIFIED BY THE ICC

The International Commission for Supervision and Control in Viet-Nam was established under the Geneva agreement to supervise the cease-fire and to investigate violations of the agreement. The Commission (India, Poland, Canada) recognized that good-faith compliance with article 10 and its supporting articles is mandatory; otherwise the rest of the agreement becomes meaningless.

Consequently, when the Government of South Viet-Nam presented evidence of aggression from the North, the ICC undertook an investigation of the charge. Because of Communist

Poland's objections to the investigation, it was first necessary to reestablish the legal basis for the investigation. This was done through the Legal Committee of the Commission (the Polish member dissenting), which found that there was ample legal basis for the Commission's investigation. The Committee's report made the following points (emphasis supplied):

- Article 10 of the Geneva agreement called for "the complete cessation of all hostilities in Viet-Nam."
- Article 19 requires both sides to insure their zones "are not used for the resumption of hostilities or to further aggressive policy."
- Article 24 requires each side to respect the territory of the other, and "to commit no act and undertake no operation against the other Party."
- Article 27 specifies that the agreement applies to all elements of the military command. This would include regular, irregular, and guerrilla forces.

With the legal basis for investigation clearly established, the ICC's Legal Committee wrote:

> Having examined the complaints and the supporting material sent by the South Vietnamese Mission, the Committee has come to the conclusion that in specific instances there is evidence to show that armed and unarmed personnel, arms, munitions and other supplies have been sent from the Zone in the North to the Zone in the South with the object of supporting, organizing and carrying out hostile activities, including armed attacks, directed against the Armed Forces and Administration of the Zone in the South. These acts are in violation of Articles 10, 19, 24, and 27 of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam.
>
> In examining the complaints and the supporting material, in particular documentary material sent by the South Vietnamese Mission, the Committee has come to the further conclusion that there is evidence to show that the PAVN (Army of North Viet-Nam) has allowed the Zone in the North to be used for inciting, encouraging and supporting hostile activities in the Zone in the South, aimed at the overthrow of the Administration in the South. The use of the Zone in the North for such activities is in violation of Articles 19, 24, and 27 of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam.

The ICC report (the Polish member dissenting) adopted in full the conclusions reached by the Legal Committee. On June 2, 1962, the Commission reported "that there is sufficient evidence to show beyond reasonable doubt" aggression was committed by North Viet-Nam.

The Indian delegation disagreed with the Polish dissent and reiterated the finding of aggression. In response to the Polish dissent to the Commission's majority findings, the Indian delegation issued a special statement saying in part:

"The Indian Delegation has considered the Statement of the Polish Delegation. It does not agree with many of the views expressed by the Polish Delegation in its Statement, nor with its interpretation of the Special Reports. The Indian Delegation reiterates its stand and findings. . . ."

In 1962 President Kennedy, at the request of the South Viet-Nam Government, established the United States Military Assistance Command, sustained by modern airpower and anti-guerrilla special forces.

Viet-Nam Asks For More Free-World Help

Unfortunately, the ICC was powerless to halt the aggression. The tempo of aggression was escalated further with North Vietnamese regular forces reinforcing the guerrillas as organized and supported by Hanoi. The Government of South Viet-Nam asked for additional help from the United States and others in the free world. The level of U.S. logistical and advisory support was raised first by President Kennedy and then by President Johnson.

Hanoi, however, believing the conquest of the South to be imminent, became more bellicose. In August 1964 North Vietnamese torpedo boats without provocation attacked a U.S. Navy vessel in the Tonkin Gulf.

This unprovoked act of war escalated the conflict to a new level. It was now plain to all that the Hanoi government was totally

committed to the use of force as an instrument of policy.

BASIS FOR THE U.S. COMMITMENT

The U.S. commitment to fight in South Viet-Nam was made not for any one reason, but for many reasons; these involved not just Viet-Nam, but our policies and actions throughout the world. Some of these reasons are summarized below:

Moral

The promise was made to the people of South Viet-Nam by three American Presidents—Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson—that the United States would guarantee their right to seek solutions to their problems in their own way free from outside force. That promise was stated and restated before the entire world. The credibility of a promise from the President of the United States is of vital concern to every nation in the world—Communist and non-Communist alike. Secretary of State Rusk has pointed out for example, that if the United States fails to keep a promise to the people of South Viet-Nam, the people of Germany will have a reasonable doubt about our willingness to stand by our commitments in Europe, and the Soviet Union might be led into dangerous miscalculations about our willingness to stand with our friends under pressure. Thus, our moral obligations are not theoretical—they have real impact. It is imperative to world peace and progress that such a promise by the President of the United States be believed.

Strategic

"Containment" is the popular word for U.S. strategy since World War II. It stands for resistance to efforts by militant Communist powers to expand their territory and control by force or threat of force. The strategy of containment was adopted by this country and its allies in recognition of the grim lessons of the 1930's and the Second World War. It is rooted in the conviction that to tolerate aggression is to invite more and greater violence between nations which ultimately, today, could mean nuclear war.

In Europe, the time we have bought through containment has worked changes on both sides of the Iron Curtain, permitting both sides to edge away from the threat of nuclear war to a more productive course of coexistence—and even occasional cooperation.

In Asia, however, communism still acts in the belief that there is more profit in war than in peace. Asian communism still lives by the dogmas of Mao Tse-tung, who said:

"Some people ridicule us as advocates of the omnipotence of war; yes, we are advocates of the omnipotence of revolutionary war, and this is good, not bad . . . . We can even say that the whole world can be reshaped only with the gun."

This is in contrast with the oft-stated views of the Secretary of State and the President, reaffirmed in October 1966 at Manila in article IV of the Declaration of Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific:

"We must seek reconciliation and peace throughout Asia. We do not threaten the sovereignty or territorial integrity of our neighbors, whatever their ideological alignment. We ask only that this be reciprocated. The quarrels and ambitions of ideology and the painful frictions arising from national fears and grievances should belong to the past. Aggression rooted in them must not succeed. We shall play our full part in creating an environment in which reconciliation becomes possible, for in the modern world, men and nations have no choice but to learn to live together as brothers."

What has been called a strategy of containment is designed to bring about peace and reconciliation in Asia as well as in Europe. In the U.S. view, only if violence is opposed will peace and reconciliation become possible. If aggression succeeds, the Asian Communists will have shown that Mao is right: The world can only be reshaped by the gun.

Geographic

Around the world there are geographic areas through which are funneled much of the traffic of history—such places as the Straits of Gibraltar, Suez, the lowlands of Northern Europe, the Dardenelles, Singapore. Down through the ages, the human traffic has been heavy in key valleys, straits, rivers, and plains.

The Indochinese area has become such a focal point in history, for through this area run the only lowland invasion routes from the North into South and Southeast Asia. Control of this vital region in the hands of an aggressive power would endanger all of free Asia.

U.S. recognition of the geographic importance of the region dates back to the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who warned in the summer of 1941 that the movement of large units of the Japanese Army into Indochina was a serious threat to our national interest and the interest of the free world.

If South Viet-Nam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand can remain free and independent, the

possibility of massive, sustained politico-military aggression from the North will be radically reduced, for the more difficult alternative route for Communist expansion is across the Himalayas.

Ideological

The United States has been accused of waging "ideological war." The charge is misleading.

The ideological commitment of the United States in South Viet-Nam, as throughout the world, was expressed by Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, in a speech at Harvard University, June 17, 1965:

"The right we seek to defend is the right of people, be it in Korea or South Viet-Nam, not to have their futures decided by violence. I do not believe this right can be secured by retreat. Retreat leads to retreat, just as aggression leads to aggression in this still primitive international community. Already an active apparatus of subversion has begun its work in Thailand. And it is only a few years since Malaya beat down a long and murderous attempt to impose Communism by force. The Tibetans were not so fortunate. And the Indians have found the neighborhood of 800 million Chinese hardly a guarantee of peace and security. So the aim of reinforcing the right of peoples, large and small, to determine their own destiny does not seem one that we dare allow to go by default."

NON-COMMUNIST ASIAN SUPPORT FOR U.S. ACTION

In some quarters of the United States and the West there is misunderstanding about the position of Asian leaders on the war in Viet-Nam. Differences in detail have been mistaken for differences in fundamentals.

Whatever anxiety is felt about the tactical conduct of the war, most Asians have no doubt about the basic issue in Viet-Nam and its meaning to Asia as a whole. They further recognize the growing burden of their own responsibility to take advantage of the time being bought at so heavy a price.

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, regarded by many as a critic of United States operations overseas, time and again has stated his fundamental support of the American commitment in South Viet-Nam. On May 6, 1965, shortly after President Johnson ordered U.S. combat units into the area, Premier Lee stated his conviction that a non-Communist South Viet-Nam is essential to keep the rest of Southeast Asia free. Again, addressing a group of students on April 22, 1966, he said:

"If the Americans decide to pack it up because the position is untenable in South Viet-Nam and the arena of conflict moves from South Viet-Nam across Cambodia into Thailand...then it is very pertinent what happens to the 500 armed communists wandering around the borders of Thailand and Malaysia. And if Malaysia cannot be held, then Singapore must make adjustments accordingly."

On June 22, 1966, Lee spoke out strongly in support of the U.S. commitment, saying the effect of the struggle in South Viet-Nam was to buy time for the rest of Southeast Asia. He said he did not believe there would be "any premature or precipitate withdrawal from Viet-Nam" by American forces.

Similarly, Cambodia's Chief of State, Prince Sihanouk, who often takes anti-U.S. positions in trying to steer a neutral course for his country, nevertheless wrote in a letter to the New York Times, June 4, 1965:

"I have never had the slightest illusion on the fate that awaits me at the hands of the Communists, as well as that which is reserved for 'my' government, after having removed from our region the influence, and especially the presence, of the 'free world,' and the U.S.A. in particular."

Thailand, in a note handed May 4, 1967, to the Soviet Ambassador in Bangkok, denounced Communist aggression in Southeast Asia with these words:

"Decent nations the world over already know that aggression in Southeast Asia, either against the Kingdom of Laos, the Republic of Vietnam, or Thailand, was started many years ago by none other than the Communist regime of North Vietnam, in collaboration with certain communist countries. . . .These nations have the duty. . .to assume their self-defence as authorized by the United Nations Charter and by the general principles of international law. They are also entitled to respond to the call for assistance from South Vietnam, the victims of unprovoked aggression."

Tun Ismail bin Dato Abdul Rahman, acting Foreign Minister of Malaysia, said on June 23, 1966:

"The power vacuum left over from the retreat of western colonial rule...has not been filled by the growth and consolidation of indigenous power. On the contrary, taking advantage of the situation, a giant outside power, the People's Republic of China, seems bent on a long-range programme of expanding its power and influence through its proxies in Southeast Asia. . . . It is not South Viet-Nam which seeks to annex North Viet-Nam, but vice versa. This has been officially admitted by Hanoi, and Peking is giving Hanoi every encouragement. Peking's and Hanoi's involvement in the communist offensive in Laos is also well-known. And since early last year,

Peking has repeatedly threatened Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore with so-called People's Wars to be launched by local communist movements against these three countries.

"Yet, despite the bitter war in Viet-Nam and the creeping tide of aggressions from the North, the picture in Southeast Asia is not one of unrelieved gloom. . . . A year ago today, the overall situation was much more dangerous...."

Former President Radhakrishnan of India said on September 28, 1966:

"The ultimate obstacle (to peace) is traceable today to Hanoi's consistently stubborn insistence on full compliance with its 4-point and the Viet Cong's 5-point proposals, an important element in both of which is the demand for a unilateral withdrawal of the U.S. from Viet-Nam.

"With Hanoi standing pa on its obdurate position, there remains onl one hopeful and effective quarter to which p ace appeals may be directed: This is the Sovi t Union. The U.S. has recently made strenuous and public efforts to call upon Moscow to face up to its great power responsibilities. ... So far the Soviet Union's role has been to stand on the sidelines and help stiffen Hanoi's will to resist. A more positive interest on its part to see that peace prevails in the region is the objective towards which all with influence in Moscow must now work."

In the book Southeast Asia, published by Atheneum, 1966, Tillman Durdin, veteran correspondent for the New York Times in Southeast Asia, wrote:

"The simple, if unacceptable fact is that Southeast Asia is too weak at the present stage of history to determine its own destiny. It must rely on the United States and its allies to protect it from direct and indirect Chinese domination or accept that domination and make do with being a Chinese sphere of power and influence."

The fact that Asian leaders no longer doubt that they can rely on the United States is responsible for many hopeful changes in Asia during the past 2 years. United States action is central to the growing confidence of free Asians that progress is possible and security will be maintained, as pointed out by Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy, May 3, 1967.

Independent observers agree on this. The

"Let me repeat it again and again. We seek... to conquer hunger, illiteracy, and disease." – President Johnson

New York Times was able to report April 30, 1967:

"Non-Communist countries of Southeast Asia appear to be more confident about the future as a result of the United States' stand in Viet-Nam and the political convulsions in Peking. . . .The officials (in these countries) believe that in the pause occasioned by allied resistance in Viet-Nam and Communist Chinese turmoil, this area can be strengthened to the point of successful resistance to political subversion and economic pressures."

WHAT WE ARE FIGHTING FOR

President Johnson, speaking from Manila October 27, 1966, summed up the goals of the allied nations fighting to defend South Viet-Nam:

"Let me repeat it again and again. We seek:

- To be free of aggression.
- To conquer hunger, illiteracy, and disease.
- To build a region of security, order, and progress.
- Reconciliation and peace throughout the area."

VIET-NAM INFORMATION NOTES

Viet-Nam Information Notes is a new series of Department of State publications. Each paper in the series summarizes the most significant available material on one important aspect of the situation in Viet-Nam. Viet-Nam Information Notes are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, for 5¢ each (with a 25 percent discount for quantities of 100 or more copies of any one Note mailed to the same address). Remittances, payable to the Superintendent of Documents, must accompany orders.

PRESENTLY AVAILABLE ...

1. Basic Data on South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8195) summarizes general information on the land, people, history, government, and economy of the country.
2. The Search for Peace in Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8196) reviews the efforts of individuals, governments, and international bodies to bring about a peaceful solution to the conflict in Viet-Nam. The policy of the Government of North Viet-Nam with regard to a peaceful settlement is included.
3. Communist-Directed Forces in South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8197) seeks to answer such questions as: What is the Viet Cong? Who are its leaders? How is it related to party and government organs of North Viet-Nam? What are the Communists' objectives? Their strengths? Their weaknesses? 7 pp., illustrated.
4. Free World Assistance for South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8213) describes the scope of the international aid program for the Republic of Viet-Nam. It gives facts and figures about the contributions of 36 participating nations (U.S. aid is not included--a separate Note is to be devoted to that subject). 6 pp., illustrated.
5. Political Development in South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8231) discusses South Viet-Nam's steady progress toward an elected government and representative institutions at all levels of government.

COMING SOON ...

Several other Viet-Nam Information Notes will be available in the near future. Anticipated subjects include "The Legal Basis of the U.S. Commitment"; "Why We Fight in Viet-Nam"; "The Military Struggle"; and "Communist Aggression Against South Viet-Nam." The Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, on request, will place individuals on its mailing list to receive Selected United States Government Publications--a free, biweekly announcement of new publications, including subsequent numbers of this series.

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