

The Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidiin – A Profile of the First Somali Terrorist Organisation

by Abdisaid M. Ali

The Institutional Structure

The Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidiin is an off-shoot of Somalia's recent Islamic Courts Union which evolved from a grass-roots community driven Islamic Jihad movement inspired by Somali Islamic scholars who were trained in Saudi Arabia as Wahhabi sect followers.

It is an active, armed, politicized fanatical group that nominally operates under the ICU flag. Over 95 % of its leadership and rank and file are from the Central Regions. It is a very flexible organization with multiple cells that has no specifically written or declared program other than creating and imposing strictly Islamic Wahhabi doctrine in Somalia, and with the express aim of expanding it to the rest of the Horn of Africa in time, and eventually into various corners of the Africa continent (proper).

Al-Shabaab and a few other Islamic extremists in Somalia including the ICU have their roots in the former Al-Itihad Al-Islamiya which also evolved from Somalia's religious organization, the Al-Salafiya Al-jadiid in the early 1970's. Al-Salafiya Al-jadiid was defeated by the former Somali President (General) Mohamed Siyad Barre) in the late 1970's and Al-itihad Al-Islamiya in Somalia was defeated by Col. Abdulahi Yusuf, the present Somali president, during the early 1990's in the North East region of Somalia and later by the Ethiopian military in the Gedo region in Somalia.

The new *Al-Shabaab* Leadership

The new Al-Shabaab Leadership is decentralized, often with loosely coordinated levels of leadership that revolve around local villages and religious leaders who are guided by these scholars for interpretations of the meaning of the Jihad and the Qur'an in specific terms as well as for the guidance of the armed conflict against the TFG and Ethiopian security forces and other African peace keeping forces present in Mogadishu. In the past, they used to be in conflict with traditional religious leaders but the radicals seem to have overpowered them now.

In December 2007, the as-Shabaab website announced that the group had designated a new leader, or 'Amir', named Sheikh Mukhtar Abdirahman 'Abu Zubeyr' – is one of the shabaab's better known, more radical figure....Mukhtaar Afgaduud (Isaq/Habar Jeelo). In

practice, however, the Shabaab appear to function as several largely autonomous commands: *Shabaab* International/Benadir headed by Adan Hashi Ayrow, is active in Mogadishu and central Somalia.

Another, led by Shabaab spokesman Mukhtaar Roobow ‘Abu Mansuur’ operates mainly in the Bay and Bakool regions, and a third group, led by Hassan Abdillahi ‘Turki’, operates mainly in Lower and Middle Jubba regions in the South. So far the following are most active and known principal leaders of the organization with some of the names and pictures of the Al-Shabaab leadership, where possible:



Sheikh Mukhtar Robow Ali, (Abu-Mansur) the spiritual leader and spokesman

Summary of personal background:

Born in 1969, in Hodur, Bakool region of Somalia. 1996-Opened the first professional Islamic militant training camp in Hodur. 1998 – Lead the fight in Gedo region Islamic movement and the war against the Ethiopian military in the Luq and Gedo region. 2001-2002 – Traveled to Afghanistan for military training and participated in the Afghanistan war against the American military. 2002-2004 –Rumored to have been in Scandinavia as a refugee, probably in Finland. In 2006 nominated as the vice Chairman, internal security, Islamic Courts Union. In 2008 nominated as the main spokesman for Al-Shabaab Al-Mujaahidiin.

Sheikh Aadan Haashi Ayrow (Abu Muhsin Al Ansaari)

Adan H. Ayrow is the present supreme military commander of Al-Shabaab. He is currently involved in the ongoing conflict and leading most of the assassinations, car-bombing and other military operations of Al-Shabaab. Not much of his history is known other than to have undergone considerable Islamic teaching in Saudi Arabia and having travelled to Afghanistan, and possibly Chechnya, for Jihad in the past.

Sheikh Fu’ad Mohamed Khalaf



Fu’ad Mohamed Khalaf is key strategist of *Al-Shabaab*

Emblem



The Al-Shabaab Emblem is as above. A young man pointing an RPG, the Koran guarded by two guns with Somalia's map in the background. The map includes parts of Ethiopia and Kenya.

The Fundamental Nature and Objectives of Al-Shabaab, its Ideology and Institutional Strategic Positions

Strategic objectives

Its principal objective is to establish a Somali Caliphate of the Wahhabi Islamic sect in Somali-inhabited regions of the Horn of Africa through and by way of militarized intervention by taking advantage of the vacuum in Somalia's failed statehood and by using the Ethiopian and United States strategic interventions in Somalia as rallying points and a motivating element among Somali youth as a driving force for recruitment and national sentiment of discontent.

Ideology

Catering to the violent and often destructive methods of committing violent operations, the organization believes in creating a nucleus of Wahhabi sect stronghold in Somalia that would create an Islamic State of the Somalis in Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia.

Inspirations

The organization aspires to take over Somalia and spill-over its ideology throughout the Horn of Africa and onwards to the Central, South and Eastern Africa at large. The organization aims to remove Western influence in the Horn of Africa and eventually in Africa while spreading Wahhabi Islamic beliefs and, in the process, liquidate all other forms of traditional Islam that has been the norm in most parts of east Africa.

Methods of Recruitment and Publicizing of Islamic Extremism in Somalia by Al-Shabaab plus Al-Shabaab's Resources in Finances, Manpower and Review of its Strategies to Generate Resources

Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidiin is closely associated, if not an integral part of Al-Qaida, militarily and ideologically, in the Horn of Africa. Trying to understand Al-Shabaab's financial means and resources without giving due attention how Islamic extremist at the global level is financed is simply not an applicable nor valid assumption in understanding how Al-Shabaab sustains itself financially and economically. To understand how Jihad sustains the spread of

Wahhabism in the Horn of Africa through proxy organizations such as the Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidiin of Somalia, one needs to understand the very fundamental doctrines of Financial Jihad in Islamic Wahhabism. This section of the paper concentrates on the general and specific aspects of this subject.

Generally speaking, global offensive against terrorism financing has only marginally succeeded in reducing the extent of global terrorism. Under the surface, the financial channels that are the arteries of radical Islamic movements continue to evolve, mutate and operate continuously, rapidly changing and morphing using both high tech and low tech survival mechanisms.

Global pressure has managed to force Islamic financiers to alter their pattern of operations, but the substance of their support persists - in a financial jihad that backs the wider global jihad against the "infidels", nations and people that do not believe or accept Islamic extremism and radical minded Jihadist ideologies.

Many terrorism experts often miss the point when hunting down terrorism financing, as they focus on external, high tech and organized financing. In most cases, and especially in East Africa, terror financing is mainly a "local loop", community based grass-roots support structure that help these elements to prevail. As for the Somali As-Shabaab Al-Mujahidin, the local mosques, local religious leaders, and local community networks provide the bulk of long term financial support for their logistical and operational needs. Mostly in kind, food, water, shelter, clothing and to some extent extensive sympathy among local communities as they bring some form of justice to the locals and do not abuse ordinary Somalis as does the TFG and other powers such as warlords and corrupt politicians.

The lack of TFG functioning institutions and incompetent officials often drives clan communities towards collective support for the Jihadists, thus secure a degree of continuing food and material support. Financing of military hardware is not a problem for Al-Shabaab. Soldiers defecting from the Somali government, due to ill treatment and abject neglect, often allow the insurgents to acquire extensive military hardware from the TFG security forces, which is supplied by the Ethiopian military. Hardware lost to the insurgents in many recent encounters confirms this.

The Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidiin therefore do not depend on external financing for military hardware. In fact, they have surplus which enables them to replenish and supply new recruits. The Al-Shabaab civilian infrastructure is comprised of economic, educational, and social units that serve the group at the grass-roots level. The very nature of low tech combat operations serves them as an efficient and effective force. One of the major advantages of Al-Shabaab effectiveness is that they do not chew the corruptive Chat, or Qat as locally known. Qat chewing is the main cause of problems for the Somali military. And the main reason why Somali soldiers loot business, rob people and commit nightly raids against innocent business is to get money for Qat. Al-Shabaab does not have this problem which saves money and earns them a positive reputation and consistency as well as making them reliable and predictable in negotiations. To some extent, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states remain the most significant source of external funds flowing to Somalia's Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidin and other radical Islamist movements in the Horn of Africa through Dubai. In most cases, "charitable foundations" linked to radical Islam in Somalia, as well as a careful examination of the radical Islamic funding, indicate a continuing flow of funds directly from official Saudi organizations to these Horn of Africa terror organisations. For example, The World Assembly for Muslim Youth (WAMY) and the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) and Somali businesses in the Gulf States, Europe and the United States as well as Australia and New

Zealand and as far as Malaysia and Singapore are active financiers of radical Islamic movements in the Horn of Africa's financial Jihad.

Intelligence services should devote more attention and resources to uncovering how terrorist organizations avoid local and international control mechanisms by operating through "innocent" front groups.

Islamic Wahhabi scholars who are considered to be mentors of terrorist movements attribute great importance to "suicide attacks in the path of Allah," describing them as the highest level of jihad resource against the "enemies of Islam." And prominent radical Saudi scholars, routinely calls upon all Muslims to salvage their brothers in worldwide Jihad as "the pinnacle of jihad," and that "The jihad of our Muslim brothers world wide is glorious jihad in the path of Allah, designed to defend the Islamic Holy Places, to remove injustice, and to restore their land and the Muslims' land into the Hands of Muslims."

Since the Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia, the unprecedented phenomenon of Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidiin growth in Somalia has offered an inspiring new model of jihad for Islamic terrorist movements in the Horn of Africa.

Saudi scholars whose Wahhabi Islamic edicts were adopted by As-Shabaab Al-Mujahidin and global Al-Qaeda at large, determine that "the highest and most exalted degree [in jihad] is the self-sacrificing jihad [martyrdom], as it is the most difficult for warriors, demanding of them the greatest self-sacrifice of martyrdom. According to Wahhabism, the reward promised by God to the martyrs is well-known [marriage to 72 virgins, the right to intercede with God to bring (sponsor) 70 family members to Heaven, and enjoying the pleasures of Heaven] and is based on the premise that [self-sacrificing jihad] brings about the decisive submission of the enemy...imposing "terror" on him and breaking his spirit. Thus, victory is achieved.

In fact, the recent United States designation of Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidin as a terrorist organization was welcomed by the organization. Because, according to Sheikh Mukhtar Roobow, As-Shabaab's spokesman and spiritual leader, "terrorizing non-muslims who come to your land (Somalia) is a religious obligation". He was quoted as clearly enjoying the profile he believes As-Shabaab has been "promoted" as terrorizing as what he calls "American-backed Ethiopian invaders" and showed no regrets nor remorse but glorification of his organization in the eyes of God. He says "while the greatest evil calls us terrorist, God calls us the undefeatable Mujahidiin". He adds "anyone America calls a terrorist is one step closer to God's glory and reward as a good Muslim who defends Islam and resources of Muslims world wide against America".

This gave Mukhtar Roobow a strong profile to capitalize on at the local and among other Jihadists-to-be in the region and a call to solicit and justify that they need more financial and material support from the global Umma of Islam. Apparently, since the United States designated Al-Shabaab as a terrorist organization, many southern Somalis who simply don't like the Ethiopian military in Somalia joined the front including scores of heavily equipped government soldiers from the South.

Regardless of how moderate Muslims simplify the source of Wahhabi Islamic Jihad financing, the Islamic sources of financial jihad orders and instructions are found in the Qur'an, often intertwined with self-sacrificing jihad. The importance attributed to financial jihad in Islam is illustrated in some of the following Quranic chapters.

A)...”Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of Allah! That is best for you if ye but knew.” -al-Tawba (Repentance), Chapter 9, verse 41

B)..”Those who believe, and have left their homes and striven with their wealth and their lives in Allah's way are of much greater worth in Allah's sight. These are they who are triumphant.” -al-Tawba (Repentance), Chapter 9, verse 20

C)..”O ye who believe! Shall I show you a commerce that will save you from a painful doom? Ye should believe in Allah and His messenger, and should strive for the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives. That is better for you, if ye did but know.” -al-Saff (the ranks, battle arrays), Chapter 61, verse 10-11

D)..”The (true) believers are only those who believe in Allah and His messenger and afterward doubt not, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah. Such are the sincere.” - al-Hujraat (the private apartments, the inner apartments), Chapter 49, verse 15 .

E)..”Alms are only for the poor and the needy, and the officials (appointed) over them, and those whose hearts are made to incline (to truth) and the (ransoming of) captives and those in debt and in the way of Allah and the wayfarer; an ordinance from Allah; and Allah is knowing, Wise.” - al-Tawba (Repentance), Chapter 9, verse 60

Islamic scholars are unanimous in their interpretation of these verses regarding the centrality and importance of financial jihad as part of Allah's jihad commandment to Muslims imbedded in the Quran. Some interpretations note the verses' internal order, in which "wealth" precedes "lives," as evidence of the significance of financial jihad and, in certain circumstances, its precedence over self- sacrificing of life for jihad. However much the West tries to impose or impress Saudi Arabia to stop terror financing, it is an edict and a Quranic order to finance Jihad. And this will continue as such. This also applied to Somalis and other Muslims in the US, the EU etc to contribute to Jihad.

Defining jihad in Qur'an and in Islam, is not confined merely to waging war with arms, but includes several other aspects of support for "holy war." Islamic scholars specify these as: Al-Jihad bi-al-Lisan -Jihad of the Tongue, and al-Jihad bi-al-Qalam -Jihad of the Pen, namely preaching and calling for jihad. Jihad al-Nafs -Jihad of the Soul - the personal struggle to avoid sin and adhere to Allah's commandment Al-Jihad bi-al-Nafs - Self-sacrificing Jihad in the path of Allah Al-Jihad bi-al-Mal - Financial Jihad: fundraising for needy Muslims and supporting the jihad warriors - the mujahidiin. This is all extreme Islamic doctrine which the simple minds cannot distinguish since their knowledge of Islamic teachings is limited.

Southern Somali communities contribute to Al-Shabaab in the form of Zakat for the benefit of Jihad in Southern Somalia against Ethiopians, TFG and other non violent Muslims.

Praising the merits of financial jihad, Muslim scholars also rely on Islamic tradition (hadith) attributed to the Prophet Mohammad, which assures Muslims who donate money for jihad the same reward in Heaven as the mujahidin themselves. According to hadith: "One [Muslim] who equips a person on his way to raid [to the enemy's camps] in Allah's path [jihad] is considered to have the same status as the raider [mujahid]. One [Muslim] who substitutes [the raider] concerning his family and [taking care of their needs] with good deeds is considered to have the same status as the raider [mujahid]." Technically therefore, whether we like it or not, Muslims (provided the council of learned Sheikhs approves) are required to

participate in the Jihad. Al-Shabaab is only an armed operation. Others who contribute all the other resources mentioned above also believe they are in the Jihad. (In the case of Somalia, Jihad may be used euphemistically for clan cause)

As an example, the supporters of Al-Shabaab in the US and Europe find government resources in welfare, food stamps and other assistance such as income tax returns as easily convertible resource for Jihad in Southern Somalia. And it certainly does find its way into the Al-Shabaab.

In all practical terms, financial jihad is designed to sustain self-sacrificing jihad and enable it to achieve its goals on the battlefield. Major Wahhabi Islam proponent institutions such as the Al-Medina University (Saudi Arabia), strongly teach Muslims, moderate or extreme, the duty to support the global mujahidin, determined that "financial jihad applies to all Muslims in accordance with each person's capability. No excuse can dismiss anyone from donating money to the mujahidin and their families...as they are in urgent need of food, medication, clothing, weapons, and other [basic] necessities of life." Wahhabism views financial jihad as a vital means for the mujahidin in financing their military activity (purchasing weapons, etc.) and at the same time in securing proper social conditions for the families of the mujahidin, the widows and the orphans, who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Islamic Wahhabism.

Wahhabi Muslims are instructed that financial jihad is designed to assure mutual indemnity among Muslims and the commitment of Muslims to their warriors, the Mujahidin. Wahhabi Muslims are instructed to "financially support the families of the mujahidin who joined the call for jihad and left behind them their women and children who are in desperate need of money and basic necessities of life such as food, drink, and accommodation."

Similarly, in Wahhabi Islam, financial jihad commandment given by God is intended "to calm the mujahidin's [worries] by demonstrating that there are those [Muslims] who practice financial jihad and do not skimp on money for their families, even if they have fallen on the battlefield or their houses are damaged or destroyed. The Somali and Ethiopian military recently destroyed houses and property belonging to the Al-Shabaab participants. This generated massive influx of money and food as well as massive call to join the Jihad. This was and remains a serious strategic trap and mistake in the part of the Somali and Ethiopian commanders to target families and punish children, mothers and relatives of the Al-Shabaab. It had only created anger and massive support for the Al-Shabaab movement.

Main principles that deal with Al-Shabaab's financial Jihad for example as a doctrine to motivate local Somalis to contribute is:

- a) Financing the Al-Shahaab jihad - Somalis can join in jihad by donating to jihad through the As-Shabaab. The donation's value is determined by its quality and destination and not only by the amount of money given. Life (sacrifice) being the highest donation quality.
- b) Supplying the fighters' needs – Somalis who are unable to take part in physical jihad (for instance, women and the handicapped) can perform their duty by supplying food and temporary shelter to the As-Shabaab. By doing so, the donor is considered Al-Shabaab/mujahid and gets the same reward by Allah.
- c) Taking care of the Al-Shabaab's warrior's family – Somalis who support the mujahidin's family is considered mujahid and deserves half of their reward in heaven. On the other hand, neglecting the mujahidin's family may bring them misfortune and death by the hand of God. These are edicts that tell Wahhabi Muslims do's and dont's in the course of Jihad

and this applies to South-Central Somalis and how they relate individually to Al-Shabaab. It must however be clearly noted that all Somalis do not support Al-Shabaab as religious fanatics. There are a large number of South-Central Somalis who may genuinely believe Somalia is being occupied forcefully by Ethiopian colonial power and see the Al-Shabaab not as religious fanatics but as liberators. They, therefore, feel they are legitimately making political and financial contributions as well as moral support for Al-Shabaab's Operations against the Ethiopian military.

- d) Assisting the families of the fallen - by supplying the special needs of orphans and widows.
- e) Assisting the families of prisoners and wounded warriors - by supplying their necessities.
- f) Collecting funds for the Al-Shabaab - Money and materials is the lifeline of jihad. Its importance also stems from the action of gathering donations, which arouse the spirit of jihad in the hearts of Somalis. There are many ways to carry out this duty: In the West where Somalis live this is done at mosques, public venues, family gatherings, charity events, monthly donations, or by urging the Somali wahhabi leaning businessmen to open their hearts to the Al-shabaab Jihad.
- g) Granting charity donations to the 'somali' wahhabi Jihad - who enjoys priority in Islam.
- h) Financing medical treatment for wounded mujahidin. Somali doctors inside and outside Somalia are encouraged to join the Jihad indirectly by supplying medical supplies and direct medical assistance in skills and treating the wounded.

Financial jihad includes many aspects whose common denominator is the direct and indirect support of self-sacrificing jihad, in this aspect the Somali Islamic holy war against the Ethiopians and the TFG of Somalia. The financial framework supportive of jihad is based on the perception that jihad can only achieve its goals if its resources in manpower and community support is guaranteed and if social and economic security is arranged for the warriors and their families through community networks. Thus the Jihad becomes community owned struggle that is undefeatable. All Wahhabi Islamic Jihadist organizations share the same outlook and vision in the aspect of financing Jihad. It intertwines with the grass-roots fabric of the community and links with external resources to maximize sustainable Jihad that can continuously expand through local community social infrastructures. For example, Sheikh Hassan Al-Turki provides military training bases and recruits for the Al-Shabaab through his Ogaden sub-clan local communities, who support him.

Achievements of Al-Shabaab Al-mujahidiin

The decisive defeat of the ICU in December of 2006 mainly by the Ethiopian military was a remarkable lesson for the ICU alliance. Learning from that, the organization made considerable adjustments in its military and strategic engagements. It has resorted to guerrilla warfare, successfully containing the Ethiopian-TFG soldiers' advance. The ICU organization has targeted for assassination local religious leaders who oppose them and individuals they know in the ranks of the Somali government, Somali administrative officials, Somali intellectuals, Somali musicians, traditional poets, and any one they see as being a possible service to peace process in Somalia and for the establishment of peace and security in Mogadishu.

Ethiopian sources suggest that nearly 1900 Ethiopian military personnel died since the incursion into Somalia. Also more than 3000 Somali soldiers have died. Targeted

assassinations of military officers, intelligence officers and others of rank and order have been carried out by the movement.

In the last few years of more than a decade of civil strife, Somalia witnessed unprecedented levels of violence, wanton destruction of property, massive loss of life, revenge, human sufferings, displacement of persons and general economic destruction. This has led to diminished trust and confidence in the political leadership of Somalia together with the security agents for failing to display quality management of the rule of law, and it seems the security organs in Somalia lack the proper strategy to counter this.

This unprecedented level of violence and destruction that gripped the country has brought to fore some of the underlying deep seated issues carried over the years into the present Somalia.

Most of the success of the Al-Shabaab can however be attributed to the TFG failure to implement well meaning projects to build the TFGs own capacity to confront Al-Shabaab. These projects if implemented would have built the intelligence gathering capacity of the TFG and would have provided extensive infrastructure to build the administrative infrastructure of the Somali government.

During the last few months, Al-Shabaab was able to take advantage of the TFG weakness, the Ethiopian Military's fatigue and the general disinterest for Somalia in the international community and the Somali people's frustration with the TFG internal constraints of corruption and mismanagement as well as incompetence. This allowed the insurgents to capture and loot many towns in and around Mogadishu and wage numerous deadly attacks against the TFG, Ethiopian and AU peace keeping forces including suicide attacks and roadside bombings. The displacement of hundreds of Southern Somalis also served them as they could hide amongst the refugees.

Al-Shabaab's Public Relations and Advocacy as well as Internal and External Media

The main source of power of Al-shabaab remains at the village and community centres where they have cultivated close public relations in South-central Somalia. The main asset of *al-Shabaab* is that they operate among their clans and wear no uniform. At the regional level in the Horn of Africa, the local radio stations and news papers remain the main sources and outlet of Al-Shabaab propaganda. At the international level, the BBC, the VOA and the internet remain major outlet channels of the Al-Shabaab news and public relations for global information dissemination as these sources report successive military gains of the Al-Shabaab, taking good advantage of the TFG-Ethiopian blanket silence of the fighting. At some point, several main Al-Shabaab websites were operating - www.Al-mujahid.com and www.heegan.net but were later closed down. Currently kataaib.net operates intermittently. The website appears to have been supported by Shabelle Telecom in Sweden where it was believed to be have been updated on daily bases. Other remote servers are possibly in Malaysia and Singapore. The main contents are sent out of Somalia as email attachments. There is some possibility that Saudi Arabian based IT specialists at the Universities in Mecca and Medina are used to develop and update the website.

Recommendations and the Nature and Potential Future of Somalia's Jihadist Movements

The source of and support of Islamic Jihad is the prevalence of corruption, drugs, immoral activity and serious crimes by the Somali and Ethiopian military inside Somalia that motivates many young men and women to join Al-Shabaab movement. The problems and abuses in the Ogaden also contribute to a remarkable increase of young Ogadenis in joining the Al-Shabaab in Somalia. The national security capacity building projects that also incorporated anti-corruption measures should be funded and implemented urgently. Emphasis should be made to cultivate and promote role of traditional Islam in Somalia and in the region through the Ahlu-sunnah organization and other learned mainstream Ulema.

To address these issues a multi-sectoral approach by both the governments in the region, the international community and the civil society is of paramount importance. There is an urgent need to bring Somalis of all ethnic backgrounds (including the civil society and Diaspora) together and rebuild trust in the leadership and institutions of governance so as to promote national cohesion and minimize radicalism. This calls for visionary, transformative, disciplined leadership that would go beyond clan interests and embrace national needs to help redefine national goals and priorities.

Achieving political national dialogue at the political level is not enough and complete in itself without addressing the socio-economic (including religion and traditions) needs of the Somalis in the region who some of them like the cases of Ethiopia and Somalia stood up in arms against the injustices and who continue to feel the effects of that political violence.

Remarks:

Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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