



## SUMMARY

### CLIMATE DIPLOMACY OF THE GULF MONARCHIES: LEVERAGE AND POWER TOOL

MAY 2025





The Defence and Climate Observatory, launched in December 2016, aims to study climate-related security and defence issues.

It is coordinated by IRIS as part of the contract carried out on behalf of the French Ministry of Armed Forces's Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy (DGRIS). The Observatory's multi-disciplinary team includes researchers specializing in international relations, security, defence, migration, energy, economics, climatology and health. It is directed by Mathilde Jourde and François Gemenne.

The Observatory has initiated numerous collaborations with European partners (Netherlands, Luxembourg) and international partners (Australia, United States, India), international NGOs and national and international public bodies. These initiatives have strengthened cooperation on climate issues and their security implications.

The Climate and Defence Observatory produces reports and notes, organises restricted seminars and conferences open to the public, and hosts the podcast "On the climate front".

[www.defenseclimat.fr/en](http://www.defenseclimat.fr/en)

The Ministry of Armed Forces regularly calls upon private research institutes for outsourced studies, using a geographical or sectoral approach to complement its external expertise. These contractual relationships are part of the development of the defence foresight approach, which, as emphasised in the latest White Paper on Defence and National Security, *"must be able to draw on independent, multidisciplinary and original strategic thinking, integrating university research as well as specialised institutes"*.

Many of these studies are made public and available on the Ministry of Armed Forces website. In the case of a study published in part, the Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy may be contacted for further information.

**DISCLAIMER: The Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy or the organisation leading the study cannot be held responsible for the statements made in the studies and observatories, nor do they reflect an official position of the Ministry of Armed Forces.**

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For several decades, the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Oman and Qatar – **have become increasingly engaged in addressing climate change**. This involvement reflects not only a growing awareness of the risks associated with climate change, but also a strategic recognition of climate policy as a tool of foreign policy and influence. This note, divided into four parts, analyses the climate diplomacy of the Gulf monarchies as both a lever of influence and an instrument of power, in both multilateral and bilateral contexts. The first part examines the GCC states' exposure to climate risks and their responses (I). The second explores their engagement in global climate multilateralism (II). The third part analyses how climate issues are intertwined with the Gulf states' foreign policy on the African continent (III). Finally, the note presents three forward-looking scenarios and offers recommendations for the Ministry of the Armed Forces (IV).

## I. CLIMATE EXPOSURE OF THE ARABIAN PENINSULA: VULNERABILITIES THAT GCC COUNTRIES ARE TRYING TO ADDRESS

### *Development approaches vulnerable to climate change*

The rapid economic **development of the GCC countries** – enabled by intensive exploitation of hydrocarbon resources – has led to high population growth and urbanization rate. This dynamic places increased pressure on already scarce natural resources, particularly water. Furthermore, **the Arabian Peninsula is, due to its geographical location, naturally exposed to the effects of climate change**. Rising land temperatures, combined with high coastal humidity, threaten the habitability of many cities and pose public health risks. Rising sea temperatures disrupt the water cycle, resulting in intensified rainfall, sandstorms, and tropical cyclones. **In this context, the GCC countries' development strategies** – characterised by excessive water and energy consumption – further **exacerbate vulnerabilities** and reinforce the region's structural fragility in the face of climate change.

### *Climate change impacts on oil-monarchies: multidimensional vulnerabilities*

Climate-related vulnerabilities in GCC countries are, first and foremost, **social**. Essential resources security – particularly water and food – depends on **desalination** (which provides around 71% of the water supplies), **large-scale food imports**. These dependencies are expected to intensify in the coming years. Vulnerabilities are also **energy-related and economic**. National diversification strategies, especially those centered on renewable energies development, are challenged by increasingly adverse weather and climatic conditions. Finally, these vulnerabilities are **political**. The stability of the GCC states is largely ensured by economic wealth, climate-related disruptions could undermine this balance and trigger internal tensions within the peninsula.

### *Transformation strategies aimed at securing incumbent regimes*

As part of the energy transition, the GCC countries are implementing co-optation mechanisms to extend the legitimacy of ruling elites and **secure rent-based regimes**. This includes ensuring the loyalty of key stakeholders to the ruling power. However, these dynamics often result in **bureaucratic hypertrophy**, which undermines the coherence and quality of environmental policies. The outcome is a developmentalist approach based on **technosolutionism** and **accompanied by strong communications efforts** surrounding numerous national visions and plans that promote economic diversification – while keeping energy at the center of growth strategies.

## II. CLIMATE MULTILATERALISM: A TOOL FOR PROMOTING THE CLIMATE STRATEGIES OF GCC COUNTRIES

### *Evolving attitudes of GCC countries towards multilateral climate negotiations*

In the **20th century**, the **GCC countries were reluctant** to engage in multilateral environmental negotiations, viewing them as constraints on their hydrocarbon-driven economic growth. However, their participation in the global environmental agenda has increased since the 1992 Rio Conference. The **2000s marked a turning point**, with stronger engagement amid expectations of declining oil revenues. Led by the UAE and Qatar, the GCC states signed the Paris Agreement in 2015, committing to emissions reduction targets. This shift in stance highlights a growing awareness of the strategic importance of climate issues and their potential as tools of influence.

### *Shared ambitions but diverging interest amid rivalry for regional leadership*

While the **GCC countries broadly share similar goals** – such as defending fossil fuels and promoting minimally transformative strategies – **the region is far from a monolithic bloc**. Each state has its own energy profile, political structure and diversification trajectory. Two engagement trends emerge: on the one hand, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar demonstrate a proactive approach to shaping climate negotiations; on the other hand, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait show more moderate involvement. **Furthermore, climate issues have become a theater of competition among GCC states**, as illustrated by announcements of ambitious infrastructure and sustainable development projects.

### *Multiple strategies to promote their agenda in the United Nations framework, but also in other multilateral institutions*

Beyond regional dynamics, **GCC states have adopted various strategies to advance their climate agenda within the UN framework**. Their influence is exercised through mechanisms such as **hosting**

**COPs, shaping negotiation dynamics via delegation size and expertise, and the selection of negotiators.** The accreditation of an increased number of lobbyists – often representing private actors interests aligned with states goals – also strengthens their positions. The GCC countries also use semantic, rhetorical, narrative and temporal strategies to influence outcomes. These techniques are also observed at Bonn conferences, which are essential preparations for the COPs, within the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and in G20 summits.

### III. CLIMATE ISSUES AT THE HEART OF THE GULF STATES' FOREIGN POLICY IN AFRICA

#### *Between bilateral cooperation and securing resources*

The **GCC countries climate diplomacy is increasingly visible in their bilateral relations with African countries. This convergence on climate issues is ambivalent:** on the one hand, it includes alignment in international negotiations (notably at COPs), growing environmental cooperation initiatives, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations (HADR). On the other hand, it serves the strategic interests of the Gulf states – especially the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar – by allowing them to externalise part of their climate responses through sovereign wealth fund-backed companies.

#### *The UAE's mining strategy: reflecting the ambitions of the GCC countries in Africa*

As part of their economic diversification ambitions, **the GCC countries are seeking secure access to minerals and metals, an effort illustrated by the UAE's mining strategy in Africa.** The UAE controls entire supply chains through maritime logistics giants like DP World and AD Ports, which provide access to land and transport infrastructure. This mining strategy is embedded in a broader influence campaign supported by the Emirati military operations in Africa, including support to local regimes and, in some cases, to non-state armed groups in unstable regions.

#### *Externalisation of food security from the Gulf States*

In response to growing food insecurity, the **GCC countries have established large-scale food import partnerships** – Qatar depends on imports for 90% of its food needs, the UAE 85% and Saudi Arabia 80%. Following the 2008 global food price crisis, the Gulf monarchies launched land acquisition campaigns abroad, particularly in the Horn of Africa, to become offshore agricultural producers. This land grab has had a significant impact on local populations, as contracts are often negotiated without consultation and offer little or no compensation.

### *GCC countries' mitigation strategies in Africa: carbon offsetting, a new wave of green grabbing*

To continue hydrocarbon exploitation while projecting an image of climate responsibility, **GCC states leverage carbon credit mechanisms under the UNFCCC**. By monetizing African land assets, Gulf countries facilitate the decarbonization of state and private actors through carbon offset purchases. The GCC states are thus highlighting their efforts towards carbon neutrality and promoting their image as climate-responsible states. The development of these new financial assets, from which the GCC states receive a share of the revenues, also represents a major diversification opportunity and a source of secure income from the environmental economy.

## IV. FORESIGHT SCENARIOS AND RECOMMANDATIONS

### *Foresight scenarios*

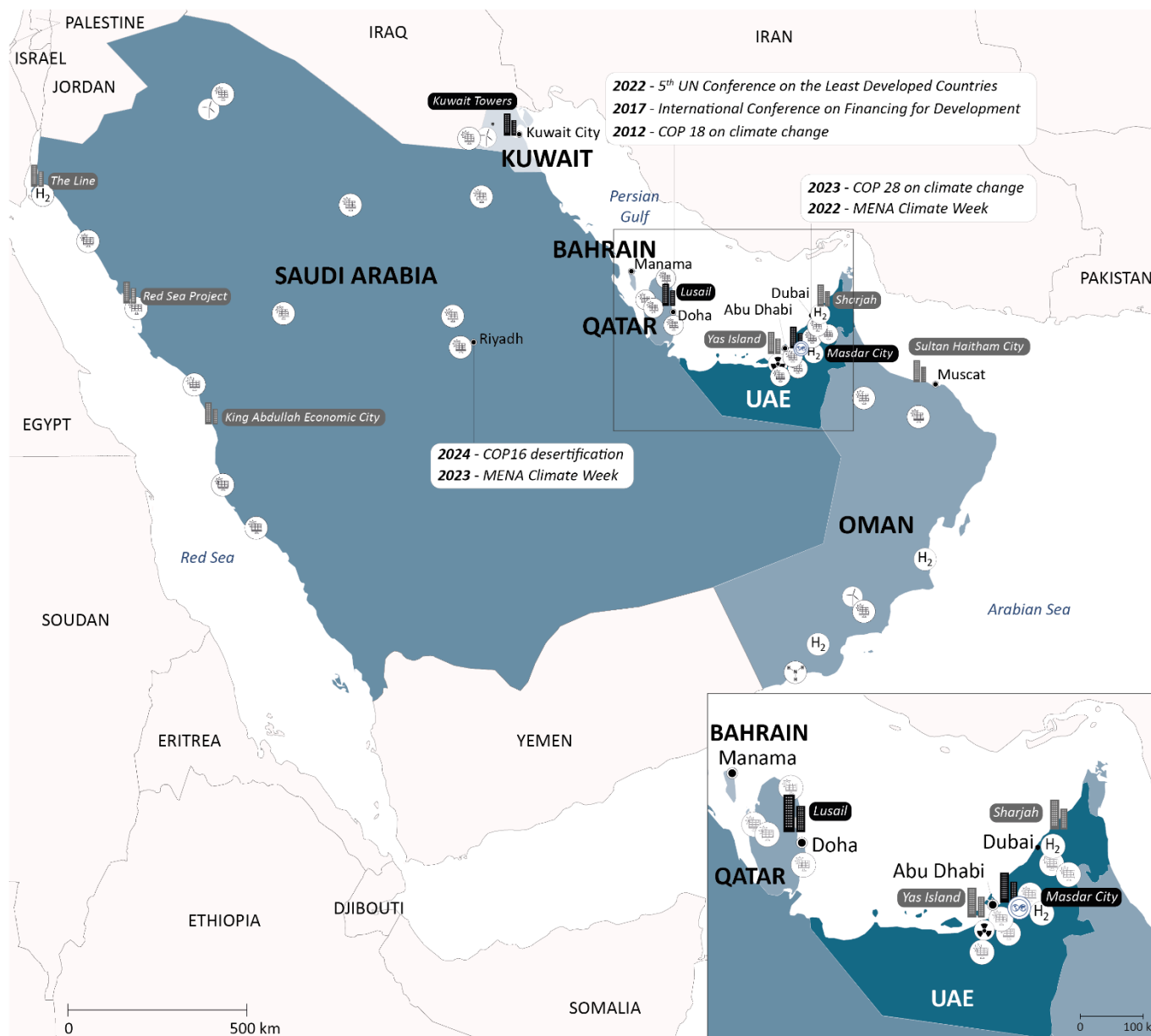
Scenario	Critical factors and geopolitical situation in the region.	Geopolitical consequences, consequences for France and impacts on the armed forces.
<b>2042 – France loses influence in the UAE after a severe cyclone</b>	A 2.5°C rise in temperature, more intense rainfall and tropical cyclones, and increased vulnerability of critical infrastructure. But a lack of risk anticipation adaptation in the regions. A powerful cyclone causes catastrophic flooding in the UAE. Energy, desalination, port and airport infrastructure are out of action.	Extensive damage to the Zayed and Al-Dhafra bases, requiring three days of repairs before the FFUAE could intervene for an emergency rescue mission. China's swift offer of assistance demonstrates its military, operational and technological superiority. Loss of legitimacy for France in the UAE and the region.
<b>2035 – French support for the UAE in the face of resurgent Islamist terrorism in West Africa</b>	Climate and security in West Africa have deteriorated. UAE carbon offset projects are leading to significant land privatisation in African countries. Growing resentment among affected populations. Bomb attack on the UAE embassy in Conakry and hostage-taking claimed by Al-Qaeda. The UAE calls on France for military assistance under the defence agreement.	France is deploying military forces. However, it must consider the reputational risks of the deployment, the complexity of diplomatic relations with countries in the region, and the disinformation campaigns targeting it. Dialogue with Côte d'Ivoire on the deployment of French forces at the Abidjan base. In response to tensions with neighbouring states, a national debate has been launched in Côte d'Ivoire on the future of the military agreement with France.
<b>2038 – Escalating tensions in the Persian Gulf following attacks on desalination plants in the UAE</b>	Water stress causes significant dependence on desalination plants in the UAE. An explosion occurs at a desalination plant in Abu Dhabi, followed by an attempted cyberattack on another. This is followed by internal tensions, public discontent over imposed rationing, and regional tensions, with Iran being blamed.	France transports mobile desalination plants for water consumption at its military bases. To secure hydrocarbon supplies amid growing tensions, the United States and China deploys military ships in the Gulf. The potential relocation of ALINDIEN to Djibouti is causing a deterioration in relations with the UAE.

### Recommandations

1	Establishment of a climate side event during strategic dialogues with GCC States
2	Development of an operational partnership for training the UAE Armed Forces on HADR operations
3	Adaptation of French forces pre-positioned in the UAE in the context of climate change
4	Develop a better understanding of security issues in Africa in relation to strategic supplies in the context of the ecological transition.



## Appendix 1. Map: Climate diplomacy of Gulf monarchies

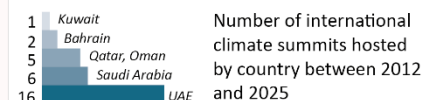


### OMAN

Member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Capital

### Multilateral commitment



of which UN summits

Headquarters of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) in Masdar City (UAE)

### Infrastructure investment

Major sustainable urban development projects



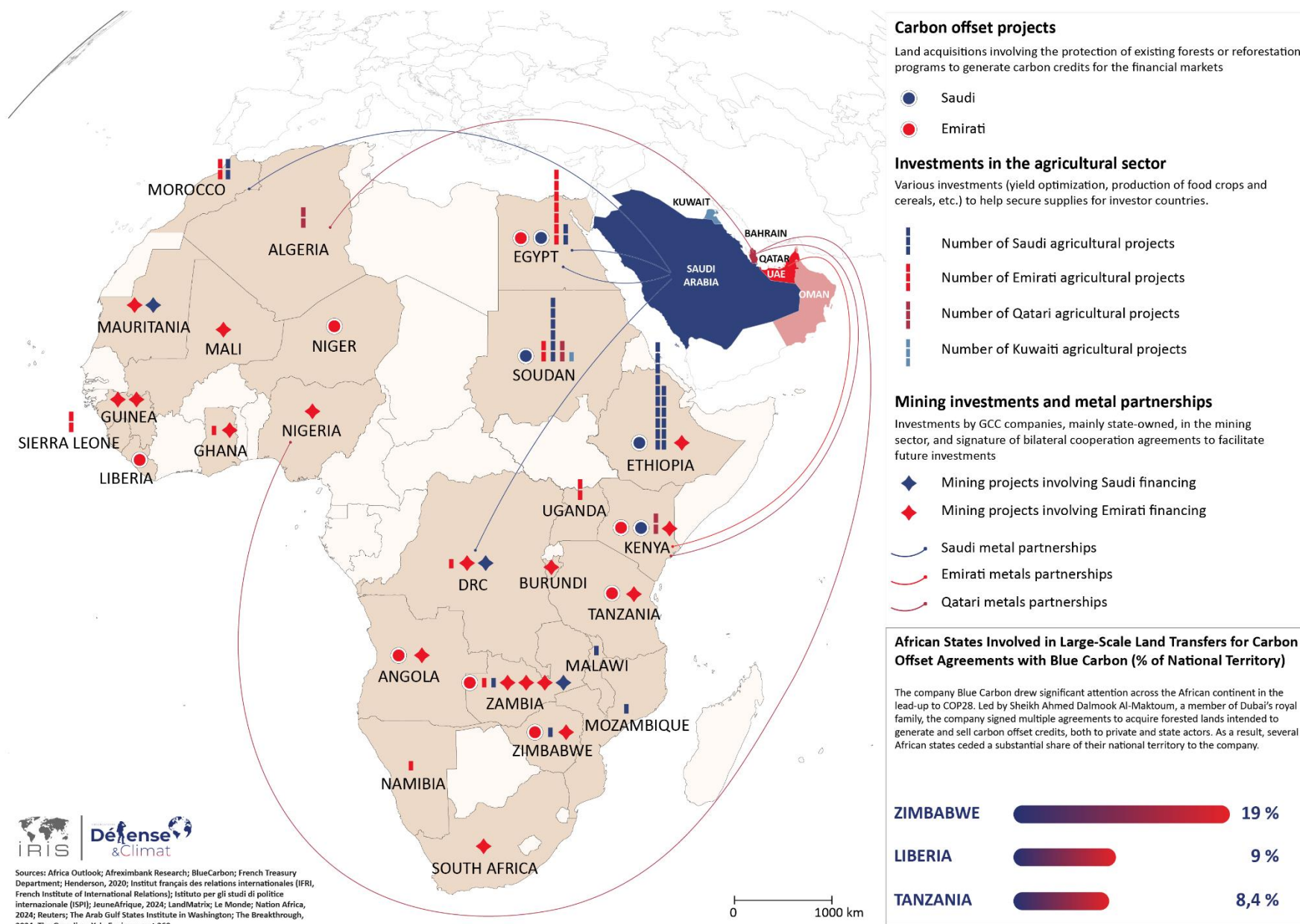
Major renewable energy projects underway or announced with installed capacities exceeding 200 megawatts



\*The Shagaya renewable park project in Kuwait includes both wind and solar installations

Sources: Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; Atchison, 2022; Bahrain News Agency; French Treasury Department; EDF Renewables; Emirates News Agency; Emirates Water & Electricity Co.; ENEC; Enerdata; Global Landscape Forum; Green Hydrogen Summit Oman; Ibraheem, 2022; International Media Office State of Qatar; Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research; Masdar; Mpower; Power Technology, 2018; Prabhu, 2024; Qatar Energy & Water Co.; Saudi Press Agency; Shah, 2024; Srihari, 2024; Total Energies; UNFCCC; Vision 2030; World Future Energy Summit.

## Appendix 2. Map: The Gulf Monarchies' Efforts to Secure Africa's (Natural) Resources



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