



Gaza Death Toll Likely MUCH Higher Than Reported, Professors Warn

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): Last week on October 7th, in fact, two illuminating new studies on the US's role in the widening Middle East wars were published by Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. The first of the two detailed the genuine cost of the American expenditures directed to and for Israel, both in the past year, since October 7th, but also going back to 1959 when the US started sending aid to the Jewish state. The second paper explores the real death toll in Gaza since October 7th, including the widespread indirect deaths of Palestinians ranging from severe malnourishment to sweeping plagues to people undiscovered under the rubble. These vivid and alarming accounts capture some of the less visible aspects of the current conflict, yet some of the most important ones. And so we're happy to welcome two of the studies authors. The first is William Hartung, who is a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft and is an expert on the arms industry and US military spending, focusing on the defence budget and security assistance. He previously directed the Arms and Security Program at the Centre for International Policy and co-directed the Centre for Sustainable Defence Task Force. He's the author of *Prophets of War: Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military Industrial Complex*, and he joins us to discuss the report he just co-authored for Brown's Watson Institute, titled *The United States Spending on Israel's Military Operations and Related US Operations in the Region*. Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins is an award winning anthropologist and filmmaker with extensive fieldwork in Israel and Palestine as well as Greece. She is the author of *Waste Siege: The Life of Infrastructure in Palestine*, a book that has won multiple major awards for its in-depth analysis of waste management in conflict zones. She holds a Ph.D. from Columbia. Her recent report that she published with the Browns Watson Institute is titled *The Human Toll: Indirect Deaths from the War in Gaza and in the West Bank*. And we are happy to speak with her as well. Good evening to both of you. Thank you so much for coming on. Congratulations on these important studies, and I'm looking forward to talking to both of you about them.

William Hartung (WH): Yes, thanks for having us.

GG: Sure. All right.

Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins (SSR): Thanks for having us.

GG: Happy to have you. So let me start with you, Mr. Hartung, because I do think there's a lot of confusion, and I would suggest it's deliberate confusion, about just how much the United States supports Israel. I think it's obviously well known that we regard, our government does, Israel as an important ally. We give it aid. But in the last year, I think the amount of aid would surprise a lot of people, if you look at the actual data and take into account all the real costs. So can you talk a little bit about what your study was intended to analyse beyond just the obvious transfer of money directly from Washington to Tel Aviv?

WH: Yeah, I mean, even that part is complicated because there's so many channels, so much attempt to hide the details. But the various aid channels that basically put weapons in the hands of the IDF were about 17.9 billion. But then our colleague Linda Bilmes looked at the surge of aircraft carriers, the missile war with the Houthis, increased combat pay, which added another 4 billion plus to get to 22.76 billion. We're pretty sure that's a conservative estimate because they've been so non-transparent about what they're sending when they're sending it. They actually, the Washington Post found, put a bunch of the deals under the threshold for reporting to Congress. So Congress didn't know about a lot of these things when they were happening. Whereas Ukraine, every time they send something, there's a long list of what it is, what it costs, what weapon it was, they tell you when it's delivered. So it's a very different approach taken. But the State Department spokesperson had tried to argue we were lumping together apples and oranges, which is only the case if you think the Houthis just decided to attack shipping when in fact, it was a response to the war in Gaza and we didn't really get to the escalating costs of the war in Lebanon. So this is the beginning. I mean, even just the sending of this missile battery with 100 personnel to Israel is the beginning of a further escalation of US involvement.

GG: Yeah, and I just want to follow up on that for a minute, because your study looked at the last year, but also a lot of time before that. But in terms of the last year it was really focussed on the aid we gave specifically in the name of the Israeli war in Gaza. But it seems likely, actually not even likely, it's already happening, that the war is already expanding and therefore US involvement in the war is expanding. Hopefully it stays confined, but there's a good chance that it won't, that escalation will continue. What kind of cost do you think the United States might be looking at if the war continues to escalate and in sort of an uncontrolled way rapid escalation in the US fulfils its promise to deploy as many assets as possible to defend Israel?

WH: Well, one thing that came to my mind was the war in Iraq, where the Bush administration, one official said, it would cost \$50 billion and it cost a trillion. So you can't predict how wars are going to go. And the Biden administration's approach seems to be: Israel attacks, there's a counter attack, they're going heavier behind Israel. So they're sort of

letting Netanyahu set the pace. And once you've got troops in Israel, once you're fighting in Lebanon, once he's pushing the United States to perhaps bomb Iran, there's no limit to how costly this might be. And it's really kind of a national emergency to try to pull back the US enabling of this war.

GG: Let me ask Dr. Stamatopoulou-Robbins about the study that you helped to author, which is examining the real death toll in Gaza. The numbers that we have been getting typically come from the Gaza Health Ministry or as the Western media always calls it, the Hamas run Gaza Health Ministry, though those numbers in the past have been very reliable and those basically count the number of people who are killed through bombing or through shelling or through some other violence from war, who end up in the hospital dying and then going to the morgue. And those numbers have been something like 35,000 people, 38,000 people, maybe as recently as 40,000. Why is it necessary to do a study to determine the number of deaths beyond that? What does that not include?

SSR: Yeah, thank you. I think one of the most striking things about writing this report was just how much larger the number is of people who die from what is called indirect deaths than the number we hear about, from what you're describing, which is described in the report as deaths from traumatic injuries resulting from direct violence. So people who work on war use ratios of roughly one direct death to four indirect deaths as the most conservative ratio for understanding the number in total that we will find of deaths once the dust has settled, so to speak, and we're able to count properly. But there are people who estimate that as many as 25 deaths, indirect death can result from one direct death. So this report compiled already published data from this past year from international organisations and Israeli and Palestinian organisations that collect information about different kinds of destruction to kind of map out the pathways, what they call the causal pathways to indirect deaths. So, for example, economic collapse and food insecurity, the destruction of infrastructures and the medical system and environmental contamination. When you put all of that destruction together, which is what the report did, you find a huge number of people that have probably already died and that will certainly continue to die even if the bombs stop dropping tomorrow.

GG: I think it's often kind of elusive to understand the level of destruction that has been imposed on Gaza over the last year. I remember very early in the days after October 7th, people who were called radicals or extremists who didn't represent the Israeli population, including people inside the United States who were attending pro-Israel protests, were saying things like, our goal is to flatten Gaza, to remove it from the map and then rebuild it as part of Greater Israel. And I remember a lot of people thought that that was quite fantastical, if not because Israel and the Israeli government wouldn't want to do it, but the international community would never permit something like that. And yet, if you look at a lot of the data in your report in terms of the amount of civilian infrastructure that has been irreparably damaged, the amount of social functioning that has been extinguished, it doesn't seem to me like we're all that far away from what those people were calling for at the beginning. Can you talk about some of the data that you presented in this report to illustrate the scope and magnitude of what has been done to civilian society in Gaza?

SSR: Yes, absolutely. So we have an estimated 90% of Gaza's population, that's over 1.9 million people who have been displaced. We have 96% of Gaza's population facing acute levels of food insecurity. I'll add to that, that nine out of ten children do not have the food they need to eat, and that a letter from 99 doctors to the Biden administration that was published just this month on October 2nd, had an appendix revealing that at least 62,000 people have already died of starvation. We have the massive destruction of road infrastructures already as of January, which means people can't access health care or any kind of support system, humanitarian aid, as well as – I just want to make sure I'm giving you the numbers, at least three quarters of housing stock that's already been destroyed, which means that people are living in temporary shelters that, as we saw today in the news, are also targets of airstrikes and other forms of violence that leave people exposed to the elements as well as infection and disease. I think one of the numbers that really strikes me when I look back over this report is that of 52,000 women who were pregnant as of January, most of those women have given birth outside of medical facilities, often in tents or in shelters or even on the streets. And due to the lack of medical supplies and access to health care facilities, many of those women are also having caesarean sections, for example, if they do get that kind of operation support without anaesthesia and without disinfectants or sanitary equipment. Just to give you kind of a picture of what it looks like.

GG: Yes. I mean, it's an absolutely repulsive and grim picture no matter what angle you look at it from. Mr. Hartung I mean, one of the reasons why I found these reports so illuminating when when treated as as one or at least as associated together is because there's all this destruction going on in Gaza, as was just well-articulated, but then also the whole world knows that the US is paying for it now. One of the arguments that I know a lot of supporters of US aid to Israel will make is that the number is a little bit deceiving because a lot of that, not all of it, but a majority of the aid that we give to Israel is required to be spent purchasing weapons from the American arms industry, from Boeing or General Dynamics or Raytheon, etc.. Is that true? And are there benefits to the American people from that?

WH: Well, I'm really glad that we're discussing Sophia's paper in detail, because to me, that's the foundation. I mean...

GG: For sure.

WH: ...More than 100,000 dead in a territory of 1.9 million is just shocking. So even if there were some significant benefits to the US economy, to me that would be the equivalent of blood money. But in fact it's much more limited than the Administration will have you believe. Certainly the companies do fine, about a quarter of the aid Israel can use to build up its own weapons industry. The rest of it just kind of passes through Israel, goes back to Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Palantir, which helps make the surveillance things to pick targets and had the goal to actually hold their board meeting in Israel after the war started as an explicit political endorsement of the war. But in terms of jobs, spending on weapons is the least effective way to create jobs. But it's been politically engineered, so those jobs are in the districts of members with the most power over the budget. And even relatively liberal members often don't want to be perceived as voting against jobs in their district. But

interesting, too, are the unions that are most involved in the arms industry, the UAW and the machinists have initiatives underway to see if they can reduce the need for their members to build weapons to make a living, which happens periodically but is quite extraordinary. And the UAW also has come out early for a cease fire. And so it used to be that you could sort of draw a wedge between labour and peace and social justice movements, it's much less the case with respect to Gaza.

GG: The paper that you looked at wasn't just about the money we've given to Israel to wreak the kind of destruction Sophia was describing and that her paper so disturbingly documents, but also the kind of history of US aid to Israel. This didn't just come out of nowhere. The US has been given massive amounts of aid to Israel over several decades now. Can you talk about what the trends are in terms of how much we have been giving them over the last, say, four or five decades and how much we're now giving them?

WH: Our colleague Stephen Semler did a really great job, among other things, he adjusted it for inflation, which is not that easy to do. But he found, if you just, for inflation since 1959, \$250 billion of US military aid to Israel, which not only enabled their military, but to my mind, probably paid for the bulk of their own arms industry. And of course, they sell light weapons, they sell drones to become a significant weapons exporter in addition to how they use the weapons in repressing the Palestinians. So in the early decade, it was relatively low. It picked up after the '67 war and then essentially the Camp David agreements were sealed with an arms deal. Egypt and Israel were allotted at least a certain amount each year. Israel's number was about 3 billion, now it's more like 3.8, counting things like missile defence. And there's a ten year agreement which is in the midst of 38 billion and that's been far exceeded with these emergency aid plans in the last year. They give them used weaponry at a discount or free, there are commercial deals, they're not well reported for things like firearms and Israel's air force that's doing the bombing is entirely made up of US weapons. So in some wars, you know, it's like, we must investigate whether US arms are involved. There's nothing to investigate. Their whole Air Force is from the United States. Reuters found that they had virtually used up their entire stock of major bombs and the US aid replaced that. So this war could not be waged on this scale without that support. So when administration officials say they're leaning on Israel to be more restrained or they talk about supporting a rules based international order, it's laughable. And I don't know how these folks are going to have any credibility ever again. But most importantly, I think, is the point Sophia is making: We have to stop the killing. And that means stopping the flow of military aid. There's some members of Congress trying to do this, but they're a relatively small core, as Senator Sanders is trying to block a new arms sale. There's others. But given the scale of the suffering and the responsibility that that we face, it's a pretty minimal showing. People should be rising up in anger and trying to stop all this. And it's certainly happening with the student movement and elsewhere, but not in our Congress.

GG: Yeah, it's a tiny, tiny group. And I question a little bit how much of that is a genuine attempt to actually stop those sales versus kind of a campaign tactic to signal the people who care most about this issue that there's space for them in the Democratic Party, even as the

current administration funds all of this unconditionally. Sophia, let me ask you, one of the things that I have found just beyond words over the last year is that it's not just that there's massive destruction of the civilian infrastructure and all the people who had relied on it, whose lives and families depended on it, but the thing that is so striking is that basically all of the hospitals and the health care system has been deliberately targeted and destroyed by Israel. So not only is the civilian population constantly under siege with weapons and bullets and shells, but there's nowhere for them to go increasingly to even get treated. And even those hospitals that were standing from the very beginning didn't have basic supplies. Western doctors would go there and were shocked at, as you said, the lack of anaesthesia or the lack of just antibiotics or the most basic things you need to administer real health care. Even bandages have been deliberately kept out. How would you characterise the targeting and destruction of the hospital and health care system in Gaza and the effect that it has had on these death numbers?

SSR: I mean, it's really beyond words at this point. I think some of the shocking details for me were in the weeds, like you said, kind of the lack of things, like antibiotics or the inability of hospitals to provide nutrition when they are faced with severe malnutrition, patients who come in, you know, things that seem extremely basic. Another shocking thing for me in the details was that as the medical workers have been killed, we have over 880 medical workers who have been killed and many thousands have been displaced. You also have a lot of people whose training in medicine has been interrupted. So you have people exercising parts of medicine that they are not trained to be in. They are underfed, underslept. So we're not even only talking about the kind of physical infrastructures or supplies that are lacking, but also the kind of overall system's ability to operate in any way that would be near normal is completely gone. I don't know if I mentioned that only four of Gaza's 36 hospitals were not damaged or destroyed as of a few months ago. The statistics are in the report. So it means that even the lucky people who are making it to hospitals, which again means that you're lucky in Gaza, are also being met with inadequate facilities, inadequate care, no hospital beds being available. And then, as you mentioned, the hospitals have been actively targeted. So hospitals are bombed, hospitals are surrounded by Israeli soldiers and tanks and fired upon. So we don't have anything like a normal kind of place for people to seek medical attention. And I will add, as we're thinking about things like infectious diseases, and you may have seen that the first polio case was identified in August in Gaza, and it's very possible that there are more cases, but it's been very hard to track those. Today or yesterday, one of the hospitals and shelters that were bombed in Gaza, I think it was today, just in the morning, was a place where the second dose of a polio vaccine as part of the broader campaign that there was a lot of media attention on was supposed to take place, but that site was targeted. So you can just see how even the kind of humanitarian, high profile efforts to support the medical system are being targeted and interrupted.

GG: I know you've studied the Israel Israel-Gaza conflict prior to October 7th and prior to everything that's happened, you studied other conflicts as well, where in the scope of, let's say, humanitarian disaster and deliberate destruction of life and civilian life, would you rank what is being done in Gaza over the last year by Israel to say prior attacks on Gaza by Israel

or other conflicts in your lifetime or this century? Like how should people think about how to or the perspective about how to look at what's happening there?

SSR: Is that a me question?

GG: Yes. Sorry. It is.

SSR: Well, I have focussed primarily on Palestine in my research. So what I can say is that there have been many cycles of Israeli airstrikes and other forms of violence in Gaza over the last 17, 18 years. Those have resulted in high death numbers. That's what we thought at the time anyway. So sometimes numbers in the range of 1400 or maybe up to 2000, and here I'm talking about direct deaths from traumatic injuries with extensive destruction of apartment buildings, for example, with whole apartment buildings being levelled. And at that time, each time we thought it was the most devastating kind of destruction we were seeing in Palestine and that we could imagine. And I will say, I did my research in the West Bank, and Gaza was always during the whole time that I've been doing research, which is since 2007, kind of an extreme case we were watching. When we started to see the violence unfolding after October 7th, 2023, my colleagues and I and my interlocutors in Palestine and I were all floored. We have not seen anything like this. I don't know how to quantify to say something in a range. But just returning to the Lancet numbers, which were the conservative estimate of one direct death to four indirect deaths, giving us the 186,000 number as of June of this year, we're talking about a number that we couldn't even imagine. And maybe what I should do is also go back to Palestinian history to say that in 1948, when there was the Nakba or catastrophe that led to 750,000 to 800,000 Palestinians being expelled from their homes and lands, that became the largest number and a kind of monumental moment in Palestinian history that people referred to as the great catastrophe. If you take the 1.9 million people who have already been displaced in Gaza, you're seeing the great increase and kind of shocking development that we're having today.

GG: Yeah, when you're talking about 186 deaths, direct and indirect, you're basically getting to 10% of the entire population of Gaza extinguished in the course of a year. And when you think of it that way, as well as the other ways you can think about it, just the scope of it kind of becomes remarkable. Let me just ask you one last question before I turn to Bill for just a couple other questions as well. One of the things I think about often is, you know, you said we need to stop the bombing of Gaza, which seems very obvious. But I just wonder, I think about it a lot, like what is the future of Gaza? I mean. There's basically no Gaza anymore. There's there's some people in Gaza who are in refugee tents and camps. But as far as any kind of active society or civilian life, it basically has been destroyed. You have disease running rampant, as you say. And all of that is only going to get worse. This is constantly proliferating and spreading. And then there's just the mental health aspect, which no one ever thinks about when you're watching people blown up because it seems like a luxury. But to live under these conditions for a year, I don't understand how anybody goes back to any kind of normalcy ever. Like, do you envision how any kind of society in Gaza could be plausibly rebuilt in a way that matches what it had prior to these attacks?

SSR: That's quite a question, Glenn.

GG: I'm sorry. I think about it a lot. So maybe you can give me some optimism about it or not?

SSR: I mean, I think about it, too. You know, I'll start with a pessimistic statistic that we, or piece of information that came out of the report, which was that children were telling Doctors Without Borders workers that they wanted to die in the course of the last year. And we do not have suicide numbers or, of course, the numbers of people who are having suicidal ideation. But the desire to stop living has been documented already in Gaza. So what you're describing as the kind of psychological effects is obviously present, the strangely optimistic, although scary kind of other piece of information to think about is that, you know, northern Gaza has been separated off from central and southern Gaza for a while now, for several months. And the people of northern Gaza and we don't know the total number, it could be 200,000, it could be 400,000 people, who are living there are under threat and under evacuation orders. Many of those people who have been under threat and under evacuation orders for months now have been refusing to leave. And I do think that we can detect in that refusal, not only an inability, which is certainly going to be the case for the disabled, the elderly, people who lack resources, but also that people are obviously attached to their lives in Gaza, whether or not those buildings are standing. So wherever the people in Gaza end up living, they are going to need support. And I think it's quite clear from the kind of messages that are being sent out from Gaza itself that people want to rebuild and are trying in small ways to rebuild their lives as best they can. They know very well that they have rebuilt before, just not on this scale.

GG: Yeah. I wanted to turn to Bill and just a couple of last questions, and just by the way, we'll provide the links to each paper, which I really encourage you to take a look at and read. It's actually very user friendly. It's not wrapped up in a lot of academic jargon. There's a lot of data there that is just very stark. And I really encourage you to take a look at both. This may be beyond the scope of what you're studying, like these kinds of obvious costs, but also more indirect cost to the United States from the position of Israel, but one of the things that many military officials and diplomats had pointed out over the years, it's now taboo, you don't hear much of that now, but you certainly will hear from it if you talk to policymakers in Washington, is the understanding that the whole world knows – probably the United States is probably the population that thinks about this least – but the whole world knows that this is not an Israeli war in Gaza. This is a US-Israeli war in Gaza, because all the weapons that fall, both in Beirut now and in the West Bank and in Gaza, are American weapons. America pays for it. It protects Israel at the UN and that we have a lot of interests throughout the Middle East and throughout the world that are severely undermined because of the anger and animosity caused by the world, seeing what it is that we're doing with Israel and Gaza. Are you able to talk at all about the cost to the United States from that kind of failure in world standing or the damage to our other relationships and interests in that region and around the world?

WH: Well, I feel like to some degree, the United States has been fortunate. It's a funny way to put it, but there's been many examples of breaking international law causing suffering, and

to some degree, the US has restored its position not in a moral way, but because of economic power. People feel like they have to deal with the US. It may be different this time because of the scale of the destruction. Most of the world understands what's going on here, and yet our diplomats are trying to essentially pretend that they're not enabling all this. So even in the narrow sense of, you know, the Israeli government says, well, we're going to eradicate Hamas, well, yes, what Hamas did was horrific, but the disproportionate effects, 100 many times there is people dying in Gaza than has died on October 7th. And the notion that Gaza is going to disappear, even if they eliminate every last person, which they're not going to do, how much resentment do they think there's going to be among this younger generation, given the destruction that's been visited on them and their families? So there's that. But then on a global scale, what does it mean? Every time the US pushes a diplomatic initiative, I think it's hard to calculate, but I think it is different in kind and it's going to change the whole kind of ability of the United States to have positive influence or to redeem what it has supported here. And I would just underscore that Sophia's findings have to be broadcasted far and wide because it's so much worse than a lot of people might have realised. And of course, the dying will continue even after the bombing stops because of all the trends that she's pointing out. So I think we have to stop the killing. Stop the dying. And I think, the Palestinian people, their culture, their national identity, their place in the world, of course, has to be preserved. So it's a challenging thing. And I will say that the student movement, which has taken much more push back than when I was a student activist, deserves credit for not backing down and trying to elevate this issue in the public eye. But it's unfathomable and unconscionable what's going on. And we just have to redouble our efforts to stop and reverse it.

GG: Yeah, absolutely. We've had student protesters, protest leaders on the show many times, talk about what really is their willingness to sacrifice potential future career opportunities in the name of this obviously polarising cause in the United States. Let me just ask you one last question, because I do think your point about the destruction of Gaza, as illustrated by Sophia's paper, is the key point. At the same time, I think it's vital in terms of incentivising Americans to care more that they understand how much their government, their own government is behind. This is not a conflict on the other side of the world that doesn't involve them. It's American resources, American military equipment, American service members, American money that is all behind this war, as well as our standing in the world. One of the things that I find so amazing is that if you go back to the 1980s and early 1990s under the Reagan and Bush administrations, there was very much this sense that, look, we're financing your wars, you couldn't fight these wars without us, we're financing your military, and as a result, there are lines that we're going to draw that you can't cross when it comes to how you're undermining our interests. And the Bush '41 administration, for example, tried very hard to condition loan guarantees on the cessation of the expansion of settlements in the West Bank on the grounds that we need a Palestinian Israeli peace agreement for our own interest. There seems now to be almost no sense at all about any kind of imposition of limitations on Israel, even when they seemingly deliberately humiliate the US government, as they did. For example, when Joe Biden said, that, my red line is you can't invade Rafah, and Netanyahu said, I don't care about your red line, we're absolutely going to do what we think we need to. And then he went and did exactly what the red line that Biden proclaimed said you couldn't

do and there were zero consequences. Maybe this is also beyond the ken of your expertise, but we're looking at this dynamic, why is it that there's been even as compared to the Reagan and Bush years, this obvious erosion in the willingness of the United States to stand up to Israel in any way, even when it comes to our own interest, when it's in conflict with theirs?

WH: Yeah. Well, I mean, it is extraordinary. They're not using the only leverage they have, and then they're pretending they're helpless. And I can't fully explain it in a rational sense. I mean, politically, I think they overstate, the [inaudible] support for Israel is much less than it used to be, especially among the younger generation. There's some billionaires throwing money around, but I don't think that counteracts this. So I think even if it's a narrow political calculation, I think they're operating off an old playbook. So it's almost like just an ideological hangover that's detached from reality. And I really can't fathom it. I really can't. Maybe somebody else has a better way of understanding that. But nobody's benefiting from this war. And of course, Palestinians are benefiting least. But I feel like, you know, it's the 100th centennial of the birth of James Baldwin. And one of the things he pointed out about structural racism is that, yes, the primary victims are the people being repressed, but it also deforms and dehumanises the oppressor. And so in that sense, there's no way to justify this. There's no benefits to be had. And I think anybody who thinks otherwise is out of touch with reality.

GG: I mean, even just on the level of the crudest political self-interest, I mean, clearly the Kamala Harris campaign is endangered by anger over the administration's support for this issue and the refusal even to extend symbolic gestures to these voters who may not vote for them out of anger over their policy has been just remarkable. It's almost like they find the interest of Israel's wars to be even greater than their ability to win a national election that's going to take place in 27 days. It's such a bizarre dynamic. Well, thank you so much for the work you've both done. We're going to do everything we can to promote both these studies. And I really appreciate each of your time to come on and talk to us about it.

WH: Yeah, it was great to be able to talk about it in this detail.

SSR: Thanks.

GG: Absolutely. Thank you guys very much. Have a good evening.

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