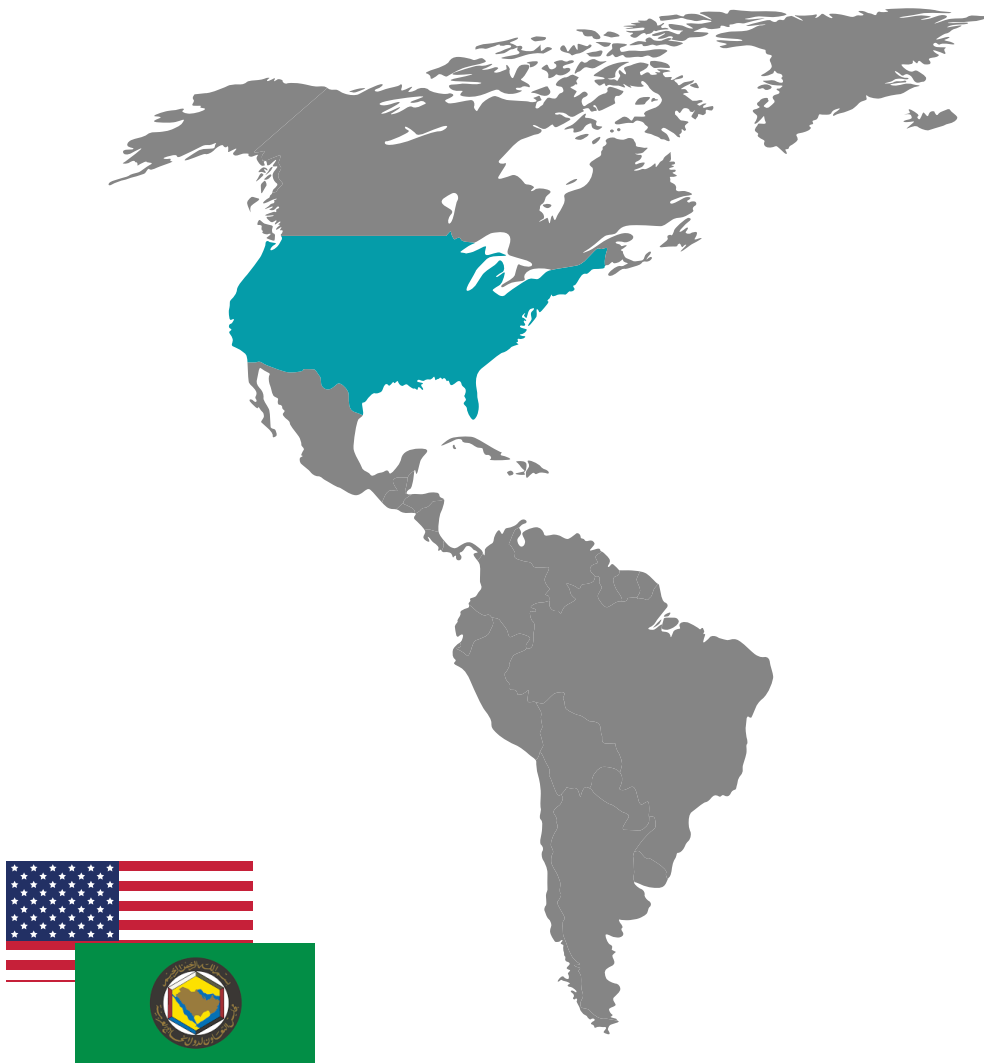




Gulf Research Center
Knowledge for All

U.S - GCC Relations





1. Key Domestic Developments

On January 20, 2025, Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 47th President of the United States, marking his return to the White House after a four-year hiatus. In his inauguration speech, he focused heavily on internal and domestic policies as well as his vision for an “America First” agenda. President Trump vowed to “completely and totally reverse” the policies of former President Biden, promising a “golden age” for the United States. “From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land,” he declared. The President vowed to prioritize domestic interests, signaling a shift in the nation’s global posture. “We will no longer allow ourselves to be taken advantage of,” he said, referring to international relationships and trade. President Trump declared the day as “liberation day” and announced a “revolution of common sense” aimed at restoring American prosperity and pride.

On his first day back in office, President Trump signed approximately 50 executive orders, signaling a significant shift from Biden-era policies. Key actions included:

Immigration: Declared a national emergency at the US-Mexico border, reinstated the “Remain in Mexico” policy, deployed troops to the southern border, designated drug cartels as terrorist organizations, ended birthright citizenship for noncitizens’ children, and shut down the CBP One app.

Energy and Climate Change: Declared a national energy emergency to boost domestic energy production, expanded oil and gas supply, revoked the electric vehicle mandate, and withdrew the US from the Paris Agreement and World Health Organization (WHO).

Trade: Announced new tariffs on foreign imports to protect American workers and created an External Revenue Service to manage duties.

Social Policies: Limited gender recognition to male and female, ended diversity and inclusion programs in federal agencies, reinstated US service members dismissed over vaccine noncompliance with back pay.

January 6 Pardons: Pardoned 1,500 individuals involved in the Capitol riots of January 2021.

These measures emphasize a sharp departure from his predecessor’s agenda, further intensifying political polarization in the US amid ongoing domestic challenges.

Domestic challenges and political polarization between the two major sides of the American political divide remain as stark as ever. In terms of the presidential elections, voters were split on numerous issues after suffering from high consumer prices and interest rates. There is also deep polarization regarding crime and gun control following continued widespread violence, and concerns over immigration. Democrats have pushed for stricter gun control laws and tougher regulations, such as banning assault weapons. In contrast, Republicans have fought back for their legal right to keep and bear arms under the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution. An attempted assassination on former President Donald Trump during a campaign rally on July 13, 2024, resulted in a surge of gun stocks and shares.

Other domestic challenges the US faces include infrastructure renewal, an ageing population, a drug pandemic, homelessness, and abortion. Democrats pushed to protect the right to have an abortion, while Republicans continued to support restrictive abortion laws, eventually passing a law delegating abortion regulation to the states— meaning it is no longer a right guaranteed under the US Constitution.





Key US Economic and Social Data

- GDP: 27.36 trillion USD (2023)
- GDP per capita: 81,695.19 USD (2023)
- Annual Growth Rate: 2.5% annual change (2023)
- Inflation: 2.9% (2024)
- Population: 345.43 million (2024)
- Unemployment Rate: 4.1% (2024)
- Credit Rating: Standard & Poor's credit rating for the United States stands at AA+ with stable outlook. Moody's credit rating for the United States was last set at Aaa with negative outlook. DBRS' credit rating for the United States was last reported at AAA with stable outlook.

2. US Foreign Policy

While President Trump explicitly stated that he wants to be a “peacemaker and unifier,” some of his goals, including his promise to end all wars, will prove more difficult. Notably, his vow to broker an end to the conflict in Ukraine in 24 hours, even before he was sworn in, was not mentioned in his inaugural address. Thus, President Trump’s “America First” foreign policy is watched with caution.

Europe: President Trump has already sparked turmoil in Europe, particularly in Copenhagen, following comments that the US wanted to acquire Greenland, which is an autonomous territory of Denmark. Europe remains wary of President Trump’s stance on Ukraine, as he has criticized US aid to Ukraine and NATO countries not meeting the 2% defense spending target. This suggests that the Trump Administration will seek to limit US attention to Europe and shift focus on other threats to US interests, such as competition with China.

Canada: President Trump has exacerbated US-Canada relations, following warnings of 25% tariffs unless Canada addresses cross-border migration and drug issues. He also reiterated the idea of Canada becoming the 51st US state, which Canada firmly rejected.

Mexico: President Trump designated Mexican drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, a decision that could escalate tensions with Mexico. Symbolic actions, such as renaming the Gulf of Mexico as the “Gulf of America,” and threats of 25% tariffs on Mexican imports is further straining relations.

China: US-China relations are likely to grow more contentious, building on Trump’s earlier trade war and targeting of Huawei. He has proposed a 10% tariff on all Chinese goods starting February 1, signaling a focus on intensifying competition with China.

These actions highlight a shift in US foreign policy under President Trump, emphasizing protectionist measures and heightened global competition. This is evident by his administration’s moves, such as withdrawing from international agreements like the Paris Agreement and WHO, possibly reducing commitments to NATO, and imposing tariffs on allies and competitors. Instead, the US appears poised to adopt a more transactional approach. Such a strategy could redefine the US’s position in the world, with long-term implications for international stability and cooperation.

Key Foreign Policy Initiatives

- On his first day back in office, President Trump signed multiple executive orders, including withdrawing the United States from both the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization (WHO), designating Mexican drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, and renaming geographic features such as the Gulf of Mexico to the “Gulf of America.”
- President Trump has also warned about imposing tariffs on various countries: 10% on China and 25% on both Canada and Mexico.
- The United States completed one of the last major troop departures from Niger after the ruling leadership in the country ordered the troops to leave ahead of the September 15, 2024, deadline. As a result, the US is re-evaluating its policy on the US Africa Command



(AFRICOM) and its respective aid initiatives.

- The US signed the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA) with Bahrain on September 13, 2023.
- The US announced the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) at the 2023 G20 Summit in India alongside Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

3. US-GCC Fact Sheet

- US trade in goods with GCC countries (2024, USD million):

Country	Exports	Imports	Balance
Saudi Arabia	11,905.1	12,033.2	-128.1
United Arab Emirates	24,605.7	6,818.6	17,787.1
Qatar	3,133.2	1,773.5	1,359.6
Oman	1,790.3	1,212.5	577.8
Bahrain	1,550.5	1,095.6	454.9
Kuwait	2,213.3	1,536.8	676.5

Source: [US Census Bureau](#)



Establishment of Diplomatic Relationships

- US-GCC Diplomatic Relations: Saudi Arabia (1940 following recognition in 1931), Kuwait (1961), Bahrain (1971), United Arab Emirates (1972), Qatar (1972), and Oman (1972).

Key Research Centers and Think Tanks

- American Enterprise Institute: <https://www.aei.org>
- Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington: <https://agsiw.org>
- Atlantic Council: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org>
- Brookings: <https://www.brookings.edu>
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: <https://carnegieendowment.org>
- Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org>
- Center for Strategic and International Studies: <https://www.csis.org>
- Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org>
- Foreign Policy Research Institute: <https://www.fpri.org>
- Heritage Foundation: <https://www.heritage.org>
- Hudson Institute: <https://www.hudson.org>
- Middle East Institute: <https://www.mei.edu>
- Middle East Policy Council: <https://mepc.org>
- Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft: <https://quincyinst.org>
- RAND Corporation: <https://www.rand.org>
- Stimson Center: <https://www.stimson.org>
- The Century Foundation: <https://tcf.org>
- Wilson Center for International Scholars: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/>



- United States Institute of Peace: <https://www.usip.org/>
- Center for a New American Security (CNAS): <https://www.cnas.org/>
- Baker Institute for Public Policy: <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/>
- Congressional Research Service: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>

Selected Key Regional Experts

- [Karen Young](#) (Middle East Institute)
- [Hussein Ibish](#) (Arab Gulf Institute in Washington)
- [David des Roches](#) (National Defense University)
- [F. Gregory Gause, III](#) (Texas A&M University)
- [Frederic Wehrey](#) (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)
- [Kirsten Fontenrose](#) (The Atlantic Council)
- [Bilal Y. Saab](#) (Chatham House)
- [Kristian Coates Ulrichsen](#) (The Washington Institute)

4. Key Developments in US-GCC Relations

US-GCC

- On January 10, 2025, GCC Secretary General Jasem Albudaiwi and US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf discussed support for regional stability and security via phone call. They also exchanged views on the latest regional developments and discussed ways to strengthen cooperation between the GCC and the United States.
- On the sidelines of the 20th IISS Manama Dialogue, GCC Secretary General Jasem Albudaiwi and US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf met on December 6, 2024, to discuss the cooperative

US-GGC relationship and explored ways to strengthen and develop the strategic partnership.

- In April 2024, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken traveled to Saudi Arabia and met in Riyadh with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, and Jordan, as well as Palestine Liberation Organization Secretary General Hussein Al Sheikh, to discuss the war in Gaza. The US Secretary also met with the foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council member states.

US-Saudi Arabia

- On his first day back in office, President Trump stated he would go to Saudi Arabia again as his first visit to a foreign country, stating, “I did it with Saudi Arabia last time because they agreed to buy \$450bn dollars worth of our product. I said I’ll do it, but you have to buy American product, and they agreed to do that,” adding that he “would go there” again if the Kingdom agreed to buy more.
- In June 2024, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking traveled to Saudi Arabia and Oman to continue discussions on Houthi detentions of UN, diplomatic, and international NGO staff and Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.
- In May 2024, Saudi Oil Company Aramco signed three Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with leading American companies to advance the development of possible low-carbon energy solutions. The MoUs were signed by the Minister of Energy for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman al Saud, and US Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm.
- In May 2024, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking traveled to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman to continue discussions with partners regarding the peace process in Yemen and an immediate end to the reckless Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and surrounding waterways.



- In April 2024, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken traveled to Saudi Arabia to discuss ongoing efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza that would secure the release of hostages.
- In February 2024, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made his fifth visit to the Middle East since October 7. He met with HRH Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman for continued discussions on regional coordination to achieve an enduring end to the crisis in Gaza. He attempted to push forward a proposal by the US, Qatar, and Egypt to end the conflict and secure the release of hostages on both sides.
- In January 2024, HRH Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman met with US Senator Lindsey Graham at the Winter Camp in Al Ula to discuss Saudi-US relations, international and regional developments, and issues of common interests. HRH also met with Secretary of State Antony Blinken to review ongoing efforts to reduce regional tensions, including the deterrence of Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

US-United Arab Emirates

- In September 2024, President Muhammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates visited Washington for a landmark US trip—his first official visit since 2017 and the first-ever White House meeting for a sitting Emirati president. The UAE President met with former US President Biden to advance artificial intelligence cooperation. In addition to discussing technology and trade, the former US president said the UAE would now have “major defense partner” status along with India to foster greater security ties through measures such as joint military training and exercises.
- In August 2024, the UAE’s Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a phone conversation to discuss diplomatic

efforts to respond to the rising conflicts surrounding the Middle East. During the phone call, a negotiation on ways to secure a ceasefire in Gaza and increase humanitarian aid was conducted. Throughout this conversation, Sheikh Abdullah affirmed the urgency of escalating efforts by the international community to improve the humanitarian response to the crisis in Gaza and ensure civilians’ protection.

- In May 2024, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking traveled to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman to continue discussions with partners regarding the peace process in Yemen and an immediate end to the reckless Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and surrounding waterways.
- In January 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi. The two discussed the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Sudan. They affirmed their shared vision of a more secure and prosperous region and underscored the importance of the strategic partnership between the United States and the United Arab Emirates.

US-Qatar

- On January 15, 2025, Qatar and the United States announced a ceasefire and hostage-release deal between Israel and Hamas. Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani said the agreement would come into effect so long as it was approved by the Israeli cabinet. Former US President Joe Biden said it would “halt the fighting in Gaza, surge much needed-humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians, and reunite the hostages with their families.”
- On August 4, 2024, Qatar’s Undersecretary Minister of Interior, Abdullah bin Khalaf bin Hattab Al-Kaabi, and the US Ambassador of Qatar, Timmy Davis, signed an agreement in Doha to magnify security cooperation between the countries.



- In late July 2024, Qatar's Prime and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, in a phone call with the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, discussed the importance of continuing to push for a ceasefire in Gaza. This call, which occurred after the killing of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh, sought to reaffirm achieving a ceasefire as a top priority for both Qatar and the US, as both nations have been active mediators throughout the conflict, alongside Egypt.
- The US Embassy in Qatar has announced a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for non-profit organizations and individuals to have a chance to submit applications for funding between \$10,000 and \$100,000 to subsidize initiatives. The targeted initiatives support the increase of political and economic opportunities for women in Qatar, promote higher education and emerging technology between the US and Qatar, promote sustainable technology, alleviate climate change, and support environmental causes.
- In February 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with HH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Doha to discuss ongoing efforts to secure the release of the hostages held by Hamas and enable an extended humanitarian pause in the conflict in Gaza.
- In January 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani in Washington, DC, to discuss hostage negotiations between Hamas and Israel. They agreed to continue close coordination to provide increased humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza and to urge the protection of civilians consistent with humanitarian law.

US-Oman

- In June 2024, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking traveled to Saudi Arabia and Oman to continue discussions on Houthi detentions of UN, diplomatic, and international

NGO staff and Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.

- In May 2024, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking traveled to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman to continue discussions with partners regarding the peace process in Yemen and an immediate end to the reckless Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and surrounding waterways.
- In May 2024, Washington's top Middle East official, Brett McGurk, and the deputy special envoy for Iran, Abram Paley, spoke with Iranian counterparts through intermediaries from Oman to reduce regional tensions.
- US Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons Cindy Dyer traveled to Muscat, Oman, from January 20-23, 2024. Ambassador Dyer discussed with her Omani counterparts their endeavors to criminally investigate reports of domestic worker abuse and prosecute and convict labor traffickers, particularly those who exploit migrant workers.
- The United States and Oman held the inaugural meeting of the Subcommittee on Environmental Affairs on February 19-20, 2024, under the United States–Oman Free Trade Agreement, and the fourth meeting of the Joint Forum on Environmental Cooperation (Joint Forum) under the United States–Oman Memorandum of Understanding on Environmental Cooperation. The two countries discussed efforts to tackle the climate crisis.

US-Bahrain

- On July 9, 2024, Bahrain's King Hamad received the commander of the US Naval Forces Central Command Fifth Fleet, Vice Adm. George Wikoff, and the US Ambassador to Bahrain, Steven C. Bondy, to discuss regional navigation, protection, and trade. During this meeting, the King of Bahrain praised and acknowledged the historical and bilateral ties between the two nations as well as their co-



operation, particularly in the areas of military and defense. The officials also discussed recent regional and international developments.

- On March 19, 2024, the US approved a potential \$2.2 billion sale of Abram tanks to Bahrain. According to a statement by the Pentagon, the deal would improve Bahrain's ability to meet potential threats through the provision of a credible force strong enough to deter opponents and give it the capability to take part in regional operations with the US and their allies. The decision to authorize the sale of tanks and other equipment to Bahrain was made on the basis of the Kingdom's status as a prominent non-NATO ally to the US, as well as being the home of the US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT).
- In January 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Bahrain's leader, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, in Manama. The two officials discussed the Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea and reaffirmed their shared commitment to international law and freedom of navigation through Operation Prosperity Guardian.

US-Kuwait

- In December 2023, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III met with the Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, His Excellency Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al Sabah, to convey his condolences on the passing of His Highness Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.
- In February 2023, the US approved the possible sale of military systems to Kuwait for an estimated cost of \$250 million.

Despite initially having significant skepticism among GCC member states regarding US policy in the region, particularly under the Biden administration, US ties with the GCC states have developed positively. The Jeddah Security and Development Summit held in Jeddah in July 2022 can be seen as an example of a positive shift in US-

GCC relations, with President Biden stating that the US would "remain an active, engaged partner in the Middle East" and "will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia, or Iran." Since the Jeddah Summit, the Biden administration has increased its engagement in the Gulf, as evidenced by high-level visits, more dialogue, and cooperation on various issues and mediation efforts. The US has also been more open to China playing a more active role in the region, specifically on the economic front. The announcements of projects and initiatives, such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement, show continued US commitment and reassurance that Washington is not abandoning the region, especially in the face of growing Chinese influence.

While the Gulf countries consistently emphasized their commitment to working constructively with any US administration, regardless of political affiliation or the specific presidential election outcomes during the elections, US-GCC relations could witness a strengthening under Trump's second presidency. This backdrop of optimism is set against the achievements of Trump's first term, where he prioritized strengthening ties with the GCC—especially in areas like economic cooperation and regional security. In his first term, Trump placed the Middle East high on his agenda: Trump chose Saudi Arabia for his first foreign visit as President in 2017. The visit was symbolic, underlined the importance of Saudi-US relations, and led to significant economic and defense agreements between the two countries. Thus, the trend is expected to continue, and the two countries will emphasize strengthening security and economic cooperation.

However, several concerns linger that could complicate these relations. The first would be the so-called "no response" of the US to the missile attacks on Saudi Arabia's Khurais and Abqaiq oil facilities in September 2019, which raised questions about the reliability of US security assurances. Another concern is President Trump's support



for Israel. Although some Gulf states have normalized relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords brokered under his first term, Trump's commitment to Israel could strain GCC-US relations. This is timely as the region continues to be proactive in charting its own course. One example here is the Saudi-led Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution. On October 30 and 31, 2024, the Kingdom hosted a high-level meeting for the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, in line with the Kingdom's efforts to reach a settlement to the crisis in the Palestinian territories and the devastating war on the Gaza Strip.

Undoubtedly, the wars in Gaza and now Lebanon will be at the top of Trump's Middle East agenda. Throughout his campaign, Trump consistently promised to bring the wars to an end. Nevertheless, many in the Gulf remain cautious; Trump's first term involved actions that aligned closely with Israeli interests, including the controversial recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017, which faced significant pushback from Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia. These past decisions add layers of complexity to his administration's potential foreign policy direction in the Middle East.

5. Supporting Documents

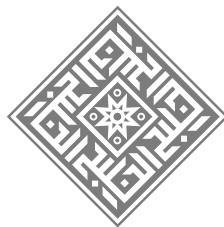
Araa Magazine

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