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PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AND THE ENEMY LEADER: CAN INFORMATION BE USED TO FACILITATE SURRENDER?

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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A single case study does not prove this theory, and more research of historical case studies is required, but a body of evidence suggests that authoritarian leaders are compelled to accede when they "personalize" a conflict. Theater commanders are best served when they integrate military power with diplomatic, economic, and information elements against an enemy leader's psychological factors.

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INTRODUCTION

Joint Publication 3-0 stipulates operational art aims to bring maximum effects against an enemy’s center of gravity which “in theory...is the most direct path to victory.”¹ At a much more fundamental level, the enemy’s center of gravity is often his will to resist. What information did Slobodan Milosevic know that made him capitulate to NATO in June 1999? Did Operation ALLIED FORCE affect him personally and was that the deciding factor in the conflict? War operations must focus on the enemy leader whether it is the head of state or the commanding general because they are the only people who can concede a conflict.² Information operations has emerged as a tool in the theater commander’s arsenal of power to use against the enemy. The challenge for information operations is to provide the theater commander with a comprehensive information plan to help facilitate an enemy leader’s decision to surrender.

This paper will show there is evidence that suggests an authoritarian leader is more likely to capitulate when he begins to “personalize” the conflict. A theater commander’s efforts to target and affect the enemy leader’s psychological factors will facilitate the enemy leader’s decision to surrender. This paper will identify and define key psychological factors common to most people. It will then examine characteristics of persuasive information, and a method of persuasion that, when leveraged against the basic psychological factors, can influence an enemy leader to capitulate. This model of psychological factors, information leverage, and a persuasion method will be compared with NATO’s effort against Slobodan Milosevic during the Kosovo conflict as an illustrative example. The study will show how NATO failed to use information and military power against Milosevic’s psychological factors. The study will further
demonstrate that it was only when NATO began to synchronize the diplomatic, economic, military and information elements of power against his psychological factors that Milosevic signed the peace agreement. Finally, lessons learned for the theater commander will be discussed as issues that should be addressed, and points to consider for, future conflicts.

This study is intended as a building block of information for further analysis and development. Applying this theory to one case study is not conclusive proof the theory will work in future conflicts. However, a body of evidence exists that suggests the theory is valid. Even a cursory look at historical case studies of authoritarian leaders such as Muammar Qaddafi, 3 Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, or Haiti’s General Cedras Ramos suggests the psychological model is applicable. For this paper, the Kosovo air operation will be analyzed and examined in the context of the affects on Slobodan Milosevic’s psychological factors.

BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

The first piece of the model is establishing psychological elements common to most human beings. Research in psychology often reveals varied and differing perspectives from experts on what constitutes basic psychological factors and their definitions. It is necessary to build a consensus to determine what psychological factors are likely to be present in most human beings, and therefore enemy leaders, the commander wishes to target. It is useful to first discern patterns of psychological makeup from the analysis of social sciences and establish generalizations about what psychological factors may be present. 4 Second, definitions of the factors must be established for common understanding. From the understanding and definition of the
fundamental factors, a model of appropriate persuasion methods can be constructed that will yield the greatest impact and influence on the targeted enemy leader.

The psychological factors list for this study were derived from the social science of psychology, observations from individuals with experience dealing with or studying antagonist leaders, practicing clinical psychologists, and a contemporary management/leadership consulting firm. One of the most widely cited theories of human motivation is Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. In his model, Maslow cited 1. physiological needs, 2. safety, 3. belongingness and love, and 4. esteem, as primal factors in human psychology. Maslow’s theory holds that an individual must meet the needs of each of these factors in sequence and will seek to rectify any problems with one before trying to satisfy the next. In an interview with Mr. Rudy Reinhardt, clinical psychologist in Houston, Texas, he opined the fundamental psychological factors identity, self-image, financial, and family well-being, and patriotism were most likely present in most people. Donald C.F. Daniel, in his article, “Dealing with Obstructionist Leaders,” identified recognition, autonomy, security, well-being, fairness, and justice as basic factors found among leaders. Dr. Jose Stevens, a counseling psychologist and owner of Pivotal Management and Resources Company, a contemporary business consulting firm, distilled nine factors he considers basic to human psychology: security, adventure, freedom, exchange, power, expansion, acceptance, community, and expression.

From the previous sources cited, a consensus of terms and definitions emerged of three basic psychological factors likely to be found in most people:
1. Security – safety; the need to feel safe; to feel assured one knows what is going to happen.
2. Well-being – Affiliation with others/family. To be accepted; a feeling of belonging.

3. Recognition – Gain approval and esteem from peers.\textsuperscript{9}

These three psychological factors constitute some of the most primal underpinnings to the psychological makeup of most individuals. Although their relative importance may vary from person to person, individuals protect these most important factors and resist their compromise.\textsuperscript{10} To draw an analogy, if the psychological makeup of the enemy leader is his center of gravity, then the psychological factors of security, well-being, and recognition are analogous to his decisive points.

**ELEMENTS OF PERSUASIVE INFORMATION**

In order to affect a leader’s psychological factors or begin to convince him that his perceptions of his security, well being, and recognition are in fact at risk, the leader must receive credible information leading him to that conclusion. However, people tend to resist new information which does not conform to their preconceived notions of reality.\textsuperscript{11} In fact, even if an individual realizes their prior view or conviction is unfounded he tends to cling to his original view.\textsuperscript{12} Leaders will often “go to great lengths to force information to fit their expectations and to deny the contradictory nature of information.”\textsuperscript{13}

Assuming an enemy leader believes he is safe (security), is accepted by others he deems important (well-being), and is held in esteem by his political peers (recognition), an information campaign must first overcome his hesitations to believe information contrary to his perceptions.
Psychological research in the former Soviet Union by Dr. Ya. V. Podolyak revealed there are fundamental principles to persuade and convince an individual to change his convictions. The information must at first be fact-based and logical. Convictions are changed when logical and fact-based inputs are consistently applied. The information effort directed against an enemy leader's psychological factors must have the attributes to demonstrate consequences, explain what must be done to stop the threat to the factor, and refute counter arguments. Finally, a conviction held by an individual is most effective when accompanied by an emotional experience.\textsuperscript{14}

**CONTRAST PRINCIPLE: METHOD TO PERSUADE**

Given the psychological and information factors presented above, there are many psychological principles that have demonstrated results in clinical testing to influence individuals. For illustrative purposes the contrast principle will be examined as a method of persuasion. The contrast principle holds that if a person is exposed to one item, that item will become the basis of comparison for subsequent items. When a second item is then presented, if it is different than the first, the subject will tend to see the second item as more different than it actually is. Two simple examples are presented to illustrate the theory. First, retail sales studies showed after a consumer purchased a high priced item of clothing such as a suit, additional accessories previously deemed by the consumer as too expensive seem less excessive in price. The second example is in the real estate industry. Real estate agents have used the contrast principle by showing run-down and excessively priced properties to prospective buyers before showing them the better properties priced at market rates. The buyers saw the market priced properties as better deals than they actually were.\textsuperscript{15}
To this point, basic psychological factors have been identified and defined. Fundamental principles for using information to compel and persuade an individual to change his or her convictions were then discussed. Finally, an example of a basic psychological principle of persuasion was defined and examples used to illustrate the concept. An examination of the Kosovo War will show how NATO initially misused the principles of information to affect Milosevic’s psychological factors. Midway through the war, however, the case study will illustrate how information began to target Milosevic’s psychological factors more effectively and, when combined with the contrast principle, helped facilitate his decision to surrender.

INITIAL KOSOVO INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

First, the information Milosevic received from NATO was not credible and did not demonstrate there would be consequences that he would personally suffer if he did not agree to settle the Kosovo situation on NATO’s terms. Military pressure alone was simply not sufficient to affect Milosevic’s personal psychological factors. “NATO now awaited capitulation from a man whose indifference to his own people’s discomfort was a matter of record…” Milosevic knew Serbia was no military match against NATO but he opted for war anyway. Richard Holbrooke, on a last diplomatic mission to Belgrade days before the war began, told Milosevic that if an agreement was not reached before Holbrooke left, the airstrikes would begin. According to Holbrooke, Milosevic replied, “…you can do anything you want. We can’t stop you.” The decision seemed irrational except Milosevic didn’t care about the suffering of his people. Any force that would compel him to surrender would have to strike at his core psychological factors.
Although the diplomatic information campaign against him was consistent, he saw the situation in Kosovo as an internal matter and NATO never convinced him military action would occur. The threat of military force against him did not seem credible. From May 1998 to March 1999, diplomats and senior military officers from the United States and NATO visited Milosevic no less than ten separate times. Milosevic was even reminded on one visit the United States had issued a warning to Serbia in 1992 that force would be used if there were hostilities in Kosovo. NATO even issued an activation order to its forces in October 1998 with a threat to use force if Milosevic did not cease hostilities in Kosovo. Although some credited the NATO move as a success, “continued reports of ‘atrocities’…came out of Kosovo…” Ten diplomatic overtures with threats of force in 11 months reinforced Milosevic’s conclusion that NATO would not resort to force and he would continue to preside over Serbia intact with little threat to his safety, his family or his relationship with Russia.

Milosevic addressed the Serbian parliament on March 23, 1999, and told them the Serbs were fighting terrorism in Kosovo and not invading another country or threatening NATO security or interests. In an interview with a British documentary team after the war, Serbian General Nebojsa Pavkovic, Commander, Yugoslav Army, Kosovo, said, “As far as NATO’s threats were concerned, we didn’t have any valid reason to believe them. They had no reasons to protect terrorists [KLA]. They had no reasons to get involved in the politics of another country. Because of these reasons we couldn’t believe them.” Following a meeting he had with Milosevic on March 8, 1999, Bob Dole told the President of the United States that the diplomatic process to date lacked any credible threat and “I don’t believe Milosevic believed anything would ever happen.”
The information campaign to this point lost its credibility and also lacked consequences. NATO’s initial military actions did not reinforce earlier diplomatic signals and “did not put much pressure on Milosevic.” NATO’s initial military plan was for a three or four day bombing effort. Admiral James O. Ellis, Commander, Joint Task Force NOBLE ANVIL during Operation ALLIED FORCE, described the overall effort as “incremental...instead of decisive” and concluded that Milosevic had the initiative to decide when to cease hostilities. As well, Ellis conceded the lack of a comprehensive plan to deliver sufficient military power against Milosevic. Joint doctrine holds that the principle of war “Mass” describes the need to “concentrate effects of combat power at the place and time to achieve decisive results” [emphasis added]. By not applying the promised swift and severe military strikes, Milosevic had every reason to conclude there was no reason to concede to NATO demands.

The initial affects of Operation ALLIED FORCE did little to impact Milosevic’s psychological factors. Each factor will be discussed below and the threat against them assessed in context of NATO actions.

SECURITY

In the first section of this paper, the psychological factor security was defined as the need to feel safe; to feel assured one knows what is going to happen. NATO’s initial military action did little to threaten Milosevic’s security factor. Serb citizens did not feel threatened as rock concerts and demonstrations on bridges throughout Belgrade occurred during the conflict. If the average citizen did not feel their security was threatened how could Milosevic have felt anything but safe? Air strikes in Belgrade averaged 50 sorties per day in the first weeks of the war compared with 1200 air strikes in the Gulf War on
the first night alone. Restrictive rules on bomb sizes for targets were put in place especially around the Belgrade area for fear of collateral damage.\textsuperscript{29} The evident presence of a spy in NATO headquarters contributed to Milosevic’s feeling of security. Advanced knowledge of enemy intentions and the subsequent ability to remove personnel or material from known targets aided not only the Serb war efforts but the leader’s security as well.\textsuperscript{30} On May 7, NATO finally began to increase bombing pressure on Milosevic but unfortunately destroyed the Chinese embassy during one of the biggest raids on the capital city to date. As a result, Belgrade again became a sanctuary for the next several weeks.\textsuperscript{31} In short, there was no threat to Milosevic’s security in the initial stages of the campaign.

**WELL-BEING**

Milosevic’s well-being stemmed from his family. His core psychological factor, well-being, centered on protecting and caring for his family. Michael Ignatieff, quoting the former editor of Pristina’s principal Albanian newspaper, says, Milosevic feels “…blithe indifference to all other human beings except himself, his wife and his immediate family.”\textsuperscript{32} Milosevic exempted his son, Marko, from military service and he thus was not at risk with the troops operating in Kosovo. During the conflict, Marko even struck a multi-million dollar business deal to construct a theme park in Serbia. Milosevic’s relationship with his wife began during their high school days together and she is by many accounts a close confidant as well.\textsuperscript{33} Information about Milosevic’s family is rare as the Serb press is censored from releasing or reporting information about them. There is little credible evidence available, however, that NATO made any serious attempt to disrupt Milosevic’s sense of well-being.
RECOGNITION

Milosevic’s psychological factor of recognition, or approval from his peers, manifested itself in support from the Russians, one of Serbia’s traditional allies. Russia advocated for Milosevic and the Serb position against NATO’s air campaign from the beginning of hostilities. Milosevic even received a visit from the head of the Russian Orthodox Church during the war as “a symbolic show of unity between Russia and Yugoslavia. The Church Patriarch issued a statement which “called for an end to NATO bombing.” Public, pro-Serb demonstrations took place in Russia throughout the conflict which further increased Milosevic’s confidence in his ally’s support. NATO certainly recognized this relationship but should have worked early with the Russians to find common ground for a solution prior to hostilities. Both sides were too far apart to find a solution; for well over half the war the split between the United States and Russia satisfied Milosevic’s sense of recognition.

NATO ATTACKS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

At the approximate midway mark in the war, NATO began to affect Milosevic’s three psychological factors. The combined effort of information, diplomatic efforts, economic sanctions, and military power, culminated in Milosevic signing the peace agreement.

SECURITY

By mid-May NATO began to build a more coherent plan of information and military force to begin threatening Milosevic’s sense of security. On May 27, the first direct threat to Milosevic’s personal security was a U.N. International Tribunal indictment for war crimes. Milosevic surely knew the fate of some of the criminals in
Bosnia being captured or arrested by NATO troops and extradited to The Hague, Netherlands, for trial. In June 1996, a total of 6 of the 58 indicted war criminals were incarcerated in the Netherlands. In July 1996, the Tribunal indicted Radovon Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic, two major figures suspected of war crimes during the Bosnian conflict. Although Karadzic and Mladic’s arrests were not immediately expected, it still set legal precedence for the Tribunal’s authority to charge and arrest suspected war criminals.\(^{38}\) Milosevic may have been mindful that in 1991 the United States spent $182 million and employed 27,000 troops to invade Panama to overthrow and arrest Manuel Noriega for drug trafficking charges.\(^{39}\)

The credibility factor to this threat had, in fact, been filled. On May 23, 1999, President Clinton announced that NATO was considering the use of ground forces for employment against Serbia.\(^{40}\) Milosevic now had credible information that a legal authority had issued an enforceable warrant against him for war crimes. The NATO alliance now considered inserting the agent (ground troops) that could enforce the warrant. The first credible, fact-based information set targeted against Milosevic’s security was in place.

**WELL-BEING**

The European Union (EU) voted to extend economic sanctions against the Serb Government well after the war had already begun. But the EU did make a point to tighten sanctions against people directly associated with Slobodan Milosevic. The EU also ordered a halt to any visa actions for the Milosevic family.\(^{41}\) The visa action served as a symbol of NATO restricting the movements of the Milosevic family. And although perhaps symbolic, none-the-less sent the signal the family was under scrutiny. In
addition, Britain led an effort to strike even closer to Milosevic’s well-being by denying “access to secret family bank accounts.” The seizure of secret bank accounts may have had an even deeper impact on the family. If NATO knew where at least some of the “secret” accounts were kept what else did they know? And would NATO later disrupt other family assets if the war continued? The move at least called to question the security of the family’s well-being. NATO had finally initiated attacks on Milosevic’s psychological factor of well-being.

RECOGNITION

The U.N. Tribunal’s indictment against Milosevic not only affected his security but also eroded Milosevic’s recognition. On the day the U.N. Tribunal issued the indictment, Victor Chernomyrdin, Russia’s envoy for the Kosovo conflict, cancelled his trip to visit Milosevic “after it became clear that his Serbian interlocutor was to be publicly accused of crimes…” Milosevic’s psychological factor, recognition, was fatally attacked when the United States and Russia came to a mutual agreement on the terms of the peace treaty. Without recognition from Russia, Milosevic had no other meaningful international support. On June 3, Milosevic was presented the treaty and he signed the agreement.

Knowingly or otherwise, NATO used a psychology persuasion method known as the contrast principle. Serbia rejected the original peace accords offered by NATO in March 1999, during the peace negotiations at Rambouillet, France. Milosevic was presented with a new peace deal modified from the original March accords that presented four advantages to Milosevic:
1. Provided for U.N. authority and troops to enforce the settlement vice a NATO ground contingent

2. Removed the deadline for Kosovo to vote and determine its independence (which gave Serbia leverage to influence the future of the Kosovo)

3. Assured Russian troop presence in Kosovo

4. Eliminated a clause granting authority to NATO troops to move throughout Yugoslavia. 44

The final peace settlement was by no measure a victory for Milosevic, but the contrast between it and NATO's original offer in March was marked. As well, given the tribunal indictment against him, the settlement, by removing the threat of NATO troops, alleviated the physical threat of arrest and extradition to The Hague for trial.

LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE CINC

From a theater commander's perspective there are several lessons that should be gleaned from the evidence. Psychological decisive points can be attacked to facilitate an authoritarian enemy leader's decision to accede to demands. The military element of power is key to providing demonstrated affects particularly against the leader's security and well-being. The leverage of military power is significantly enhanced against all factors when combined with synergistic effects from the diplomatic, economic, and information elements of power as well.

The Kosovo case study illuminates the need to carefully examine the context of what information has already been conveyed to the enemy leader and how military power can be leveraged to reinforce the message. Information operations is the tool for the commander to fuse the psychological impact of information and military force. Joint Pub
3-13 states "The human decision making processes are the ultimate target for offensive IO."\(^45\) However, as Timothy L. Thomas stated in his article "The Mind has no Firewalls," "Our obsession with a 'system of systems,' 'information dominance,' and other such terminology is most likely a leading cause of our neglect of the human factor in our theories of information warfare."\(^46\) It is important not to lose sight of the ultimate goal of information operations: to compel the enemy to surrender.

The enemy's psychological factors security, well-being, and recognition should be cornerstone targets in the planning process. Early identification of appropriate target sets directly linked to the three psychological decisive points will help build a comprehensive and effects-based plan to persuade the leader to surrender. Intelligence channels are key to providing the commander with relevant information to use in choosing the optimum course of action. For example, the Defense Intelligence Agency is currently gathering information on foreign leaders and examining what information may be effective against them and how they react to information inputs and how they make decisions.\(^47\) The U.S. military is good at targeting tangible objects. Targeting intangible objects, such as psychological factors, becomes much more difficult as it requires a higher level of thinking. However, CINC's must direct their staffs to begin thinking in terms of how information operations can be used to target and influence an enemy leader to surrender. And his psychological factors are the most lucrative decisive points to his will to continue the fight.

Further, diplomatic efforts will most likely be the lead arm of national power when negotiating with the enemy. Empty diplomatic gestures can actually make subsequent application of military force more difficult to achieve the objectives. While
the commander may not have any influence on diplomatic strategies, the same concept should be applied to flexible deterrent options. The psychological affects intended by the use of flexible deterrent options can actually work counterproductive to the objectives if they are not judiciously used or backed by a sufficient will to use military force should they fail. Indiscriminate use of flexible deterrent options could undermine or even convince an enemy that the threat is empty and no consequences are likely to follow the show of force.

Targeting and attacking a leader’s psychological factors to persuade him to concede is likely to be even more important in the future. Many nations are advancing their technological capabilities in information as well as intelligence assets. “It is estimated that by (the year) 2010 at least ten countries will have orbited imaging satellite systems with a resolution of one meter or less.”48 As a result of the proliferating capabilities, it will be more difficult for theater commanders to rely solely on basic operational tenets such as surprise, movement, or maneuver to gain military advantages. It will be imperative for commanders to consider and focus military affects together with the diplomatic, economic, and information elements of power to exploit the leader’s psychological factors.

CONCLUSION

The theory of basic psychological factors and the Kosovo case study provide evidence that an authoritarian leader is more likely to capitulate when he begins to “personalize” the conflict. Using psychological methods to persuade an enemy is not a new concept but the application of massed affects against an enemy leader’s psychological factors in the information age is taking on new dimensions. Although this
one study does not prove the espoused theory, more research on historical cases is called for and should shed more light on the theory's application to modern-day combat.

Planning a comprehensive operation using all elements of national power requires intense planning and focus especially with regard to applying consistent and direct pressure on an enemy leader's psychological factors. Operational commanders should take advantage of the tools and capabilities available to them now to ensure the military arm is ready to attack the psychological decisive points.

3 David C. Martin and John Walcott, The Inside Story of America's War Against Terrorism. (HarperCollins Publisher, 1988), 258-322: One example is the United States' decision to attack Muammar Qaddafi's headquarters and living area in Tripoli, Libya, in response to numerous Libyan state-sponsored terrorist attacks against the United States. Operation El Dorado Canyon was a one night air raid "measured not in material destroyed but by its effect [sic] on Qaddafi." (312). The air strike dropped ordnance on Qaddafi's primary political, military, and family compound which directly attacked two of the three psychological factors described in this paper. Qaddafi's security was threatened by bombs exploding his the area where he conducted business and made his home. His sense of well-being was simultaneously affected since his family-lived within the facilities. (258-288). The third psychological factor, recognition, was nearly non-existent for Qaddafi in the political sense. Libya had "almost no friends" and the Soviet Union had publicly disavowed Qaddafi in previous foreign policy announcements (289). For nearly three months after the strike, Qaddafi made no public appearance and was described as "...disoriented and depressed, barely coherent." By a "Yemeni official" who spoke with Qaddafi during that period. (316). Qaddafi seemed to have "turned off his terror machine" (314).
1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, etc.;
2) Safety/security: out of danger;
3) Belonginess and Love: affiliate with others, be accepted; and
4) Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition
5) Cognitive: to know, to understand, and explore;
6) Aesthetic: symmetry, order, and beauty;
7) Self-actualization: to find self-fulfillment and realize one's potential; and
8) Transcendence: to help others find self-fulfillment and realize their potential
7 Daniel and Hayes, "Dealing with Obstructionist Leaders"
Ibid. Definitions for each term were evaluated from each source and to list each definition for all terms would take too much space for this paper. The author selected the three factors and defined each one based on similarities between all factors considered by the different sources. Dr. Stevens, during the telephone interview, confirmed the factors and definitions were in accord with psychological principles and definitions were sound according to accepted psychological practices.

10 Daniel and Hayes, "Dealing with Obstructionist Leaders," 74


12 Ya. V. Podolyak, "Practical Questions in Military Psychology." (USSR Report: DTIC AD-B140 476. 27 December 1989), 64

13 Cottam, Foreign Policy Decision Making, the Influence of Cognition, 125

14 Podolyak, 60-65


21 Polsen, 51

22 Mentorn, Barraclough, Carey Productions, “Vanishing Targets,” Part 1

23 Polsen, 74

24 Ibid, 40


27 Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Operations, A-1


30 Timothy L. Thomas, “Kosovo and the Current Myth of Information Superiority” The author is aware NATO officially denies that a spy was operating within the NATO headquarters or that information on combat plans were leaked to the Serb Government. However, the opinion of NATO's Supreme Allied Commander that there was substantial evidence of hostile espionage during the conflict is particularly compelling.


32 Ignatieff, 52


37 Polsen, 74


40 Polsen, 74


44 Polsen, 75-81


46 Thomas, “The Mind Has No Firewall.”


48 Mellinger, 62


Ellis, James O. Briefing, Summer 1999. Author has paper copy of the briefing.

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