CIA: The Critical Years

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Abstract

Our foreign policy agenda in the Middle East is attributed to the decisions of the CIA's Directors of Intelligence (DCI) and the Presidents they served. Overviewed here are two DCIs: William Casey and George Tenet, and a third to a lesser degree, James Woolsey. In addition to seeing how their tenures have impacted the Agency, the operations of the CIA in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran in the decades leading up to the attacks of 9/11 culminated in this tragedy. The paper that follows seeks to elaborate on how the CIA's clandestine operations were predecessors to the War on Terror, which has now spread to sub-Saharan Africa. The operations overseen by Casey and Tenet inadvertently created a new enemy, the subculture that led to the attack of 9/11, and the changing of today's foreign policy decisions in the Arab world.

Creating the Enemy

The infamous day when the Twin Towers fell was the capstone on a long and insidious campaign brought about by years of involvement by the Central Intelligence Agency in the Middle East. The war in the Middle East did not begin on September 11, 2001, but had been an off and on struggle dating back to the early 1950s with the installation of the Shah in Iran. Although loosely connected to Iran, the United States supported Saddam Hussein leading up to the Second Gulf War. Decades ago when these secret operation were first undertaken, the future was not of concern; few realized that our once-allies could become our greatest enemies. To understand the present, one must know the past, so as not to repeat it. The agendas of two Directors of Central Intelligence (DCI) are the most apparent reactions of the operations they oversaw. Here, we will examine the careers of William Casey and George Tenet, and how the Agency was changed after

they left. In addition we will evaluate the relationships of the DCIs with the presidents they served to see whether or not it had a drastic effect on the CIA's operations. Ultimately, the CIA delved into clandestine operations and inadvertently fostered a new enemy and their subculture which in part caused 9/11. In reaction, the United States now have an expanding War on Terror in Afghanistan, Northern Africa, and Pakistan.

"A Legacy of Lies": William "Bill" Casey

William Casey was born in 1913 in New York. He held numerous roles in the public realm, as well as the private. After achieving a law degree, he served in Europe in the Office of Strategic Services OSS. When World War II ended, he practiced corporate law in New York City, and even ran in the 1966 race for Congress in his district (where he lost). In the years to come, he would serve on various committees and boards in Washington. In 1980 he served as presidential nominee Ronald Reagan's campaign manager, where he excelled and formed a very close relationship with him (United States Senate 13). Casey was dismayed when he was offered the position of Director of Intelligence; he had high hopes of becoming the Secretary of State. 'You don't look like Secretary of State. You don't talk like Secretary of State. You only think like one,' National Security Advisor Richard Allen had told him (qtd. in *Burn Before Reading* 190).

When Casey was nominated to be the next DCI, he was an unlikely choice. In fact, most were surprised that President Reagan had chosen him. As far as appearances go, he was unkempt, foul and arrogant. For the face of an upstanding agency, he was far from proper. But as for the CIA's legacy of failure and lack of foresight, Casey fit right in. Reagan trusted Casey, but Casey was not to be trusted. He was so bold as to change the conclusions of agents' reports to reflect his own political ideologies (Weiner 2008, 434-9). When he started, he immediately

proved himself to be swift to action. Casey wanted to revitalize the Agency, boost morale, and give it a new start. One of his first orders of business was to let go anyone who did not follow orders quickly, or agents that were weak links. Agents who had little to offer the Agency were quickly relieved of duty.

If there was one thing Casey had going for him at the beginning, it was his relationship with the President; it was one of the closest relationships between the President and a DCI ever seen. This coordination would allow the two to undertake secret wars in Afghanistan and Nicaragua. But eventually the scandal leaked to the public in 1986. During investigations of the Iran-*contra* debacle, Casey and those involved—including the President—denied any and all involvement.

After he died in 1987, he left the Agency in shambles, leaving the DCIs to follow to clean the mess he created. Before Casey, the Agency was dysfunctional at best. After he died and DCI Judge Webster was inaugurated, the CIA was not ready to change, nor was it going to. Weiner (2008) writes that after even Webster's vow to remain honest with Congress in its operations, it did not want to take any chances. Congress then took on even more oversight of CIA operations. In any clandestine operations after 1987, the CIA would have to report to one of various Congressional committees. No longer would the CIA work as a political instrument (480). This was the first piece of legislation that was part of Congress's package plan to have oversight of the CIA. It later added Intelligence Authorization Act of 1991, which required the President's approval of clandestine missions abroad.

Saving a Sunken Vessel: George Tenet

George Tenet was born in New York in 1953. A Georgetown University graduate, he went on to receive his Master's in international affairs in 1978. From the start, his whole career

had been in Washington. He began as a legislative aide to Senator John Heinz (R-PA) from 1982-1985, when he stayed in the Senate to work on the Senate Intelligence committee as a staffer and eventually Director until 1993. At the end of DCI John Deutsch's short tenure, Tenet worked as Deputy Director until 1996, when he became standing Director when Deutsch resigned. Filling the next hierarchy role, George Tenet was nominated to be the new Director of Intelligence in 1997 (Diamond 2004).

Turner (2005) described that his mission, like DCIs John McCone and William Colby before him, was to revitalize the Agency, from the inside out. He was concerned with the institution's ethics just as much as its bureaucratic inner workings. He sought vigorously to strip the Agency, then modernize, strengthen, and reform it. The world was changing, and the Agency needed to change with it. Computers, digital information, and the internet were booming at the time, but the CIA was stuck in the days of the Cold War, using Cold War-era methods and philosophies (Turner 2005, 240-46). Since the end of the Casey administration, the CIA had suffered budget cuts and scrutiny from Capitol Hill; in recent years, the Agency has had to do more with less. Austerity measures coupled with its broken bureaucratic systems left the Agency in dismal shape. As one of the first orders of business, Tenet petitioned Congress for a multi-billion dollar overhaul plan. Tenet promised a $1.8 billion stimulus plan and millions more in miscellaneous funds would get the Agency in full working order by 2002. It was the largest intelligence project since 1982, and Congress said that there was more to come (Weiner, 2008, 552-3).

Turner (2005) also described Tenet's tenure as having a "global role" for the CIA. His redirection of the Agency reshaped the overall image of the CIA. When Tenet was called to facilitate Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in 1998, some feared the Agency was getting in to an

arena it did not belong. "The CIA is not making policy," Tenet said, "but helping carry it out." Tenet continued, "This is consistent with the agency's history of fighting terrorism and helping friends and allies in the region live together peacefully and safely." As Islamic terrorism was becoming an increasing threat, Tenet saw an opportunity to learn more about it to effectively combat it.

Tenet fared well at the Agency because he boosted morale (he was often known as a very down to earth guy) and succeeded in reviving the CIA until he reported incredibly faulty intelligence on Saddam's weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), which ultimately led to his resignation in 2004. It appeared, at the time, that the words "success" and "CIA" just did not coincide. As the future DCI Peter Goss states, "there aren't any successes that are particularly grand" (Turner 240-6).

Afghanistan

When the Soviets made one last push into Afghanistan to save the Republic, it could not account for the might of a lone politician from the United States. Author George Crile (2003) describes future senator Charlie Wilson as a child who had adopted the value of American exceptionalism. His hatred for the Nazis as a boy fueled his hatred for the Soviets. He traveled to Afghanistan and immediately took on the plight of the Freedom Fighters known as the mujahidin. Their war was to become the next proxy war for the United States against the Soviets. Wilson dedicated the rest of his political career to seeing the victory of the mujahidin. After years of working through his own connections, he won over the attention of the CIA. After some deliberation, Casey would eventually become very involved in Charlie Wilson's war, as it came to be called. In fact by 1985, over 50% of the Agency's budget was devoted to the war in Afghanistan. It would increase to 70% by the next year (*Charlie Wilson's War*). The CIA was

able to operate via Wilson's connection to Pakistani president Muhammad Zia-al-huq. When questioned in Moscow, Zia duped the Soviets in telling the Soviet secretary-general that Pakistan was not involved in assisting the Freedom Fighters. Had Russia found out, it could have ignited World War III. Through a common goal and a common enemy, the United States was able to find another ally in the Middle East, a place that was quickly becoming a hotbed for anti-American sentiments. Had it not been for Wilson, the CIA's involvement in Afghanistan may have been delayed, and U.S. involvement may have played out much differently.

So, what happened between 1987 and 2001 that made our ally against the Soviets turn against us and become our arch enemy? Crile (2003) states that this change from ally to enemy began almost immediately following the end of the Afghan-Soviet war. In September of 1991, the Senate Committee cut out Afghanistan from its annual budget. For the past decade, the U.S. had been funding a secret war, and suddenly, had turned the other way. After cutting funding to the Afghans, the United States no longer supported their revolution. After Desert Storm, our troop presence in Saudi Arabia led most Muslims to believe we only wanted to take over the Islamic oil fields in a plan to obtain world domination. To put it shortly, the Islamic people felt betrayed. Osama bin Laden—a former mujahidin warrior—rose through the ranks to become the world's most wanted terrorist and preached of America's infidelity and subsequently ignited the al-Qaeda movement (Crile 507-23).

In the years to come, the Agency continued to make one blunder after another. A series of botched bombings and missile strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan killed civilians and not their intended targets; Tenet seldom allowed for more, and for good reason. He became so prudent that when he received credible reports that bin Laden was in Afghanistan and the CIA had the opportunity to take him out, Tenet refused the order (Weiner 2008, 545-8). This would

not be the first time, but if he had allowed for one more strike, the Twin Towers may still be standing over Manhattan today. After the attacks, the White House was trying to find connections between al Qaeda and Iraq. Senior CIA officer Tyler Drumheller (2006) writes, "the war…turned Iraq into a magnet and training ground for new terrorists who want to strike at the United States." Tenet was trying to tell the President that Iraq was not the place to be, and that he should direct military efforts toward Afghanistan. This would be one of the few times when the Agency was correct in their analyses.

Pakistan

Soon after the Soviets were pushed out of Afghanistan and the empire began to crumble under its own weight, our relations with the Pakistanis were to turn cold. As Weiner (2008) notes, the more intense Tenet's battle to get bin Laden became, the more the mistakes that were made—deadly ones. The CIA authorized the use of drone strikes and bombings to target areas where supposed al Qaeda members were housed. All too often was the intelligence faulty and the missiles killed civilians, or they did not even take out the intended the targets, such was the case of the bombing of Khost in an attempt to neutralize bin Laden in 1999 (Weiner 2008, 542). These bombings angered the Pakistani government. The United States' mission was to take out terrorists, not innocent civilians. Just as brutal attacks had instigated resentment of Americans in Iraq in later years, Pakistan turned its back on America.

Today the relations between Pakistan and the United States are neither hostile nor friendly. They have been known to harbor the Taliban and al Qaeda members, but to our knowledge have not instigated attacks directly against us. It is for this reason that the war in Afghanistan continues. Stephen (2012) stated that Pakistan, who wishes to assert their influence in Afghanistan, is reluctant to negotiate with the United States ("The Right Way Out of

Afghanistan"). Yet drone strikes in recent years have served to be quite successful, Plaw (2012) reports. Citizen casualties have been minimal. Although numbers vary slightly, since the strikes began in 2004, there have been approximately 83 civilian casualties, compared to 1,572 "low-level militant" casualties. "On September 3, 2008, the head of the Pakistani Army, General Ashfaq Kayani, harshly condemned the US operation and vowed that the Pakistani Army would resist such violations of sovereignty 'at all costs.'" Soldiers have been known to fire warning shots at ground troops and helicopters. The drones nonetheless continue to terrorize Pakistani citizens. The operations have been harshly criticized abroad, regardless of how effective they have been in eliminating both the Taliban and al Qaeda members, but because Pakistan welcomes them, continuing to dismantle them creates a conflict of interest.

Iran

American influence in Iran goes back nearly to the very beginning of the CIA itself. In 1953, in an effort to control the oil fields, the CIA installed a dictator in Iran, the Shah. He ruled with an iron fist, causing many bloody scenes in the streets and tyranny in the Iranian government. Unstable political climates came to a head in 1979 when Iranians stormed the U.S. embassy, taking 66 Americans hostage. President Reagan and Casey would inherit the crisis from President Carter, but eventually they were released in 1981—444 days after captivity.

Around this time also, terrorism was beginning to gain global recognition. Airplane terrorist hijackings had been occurring since the turn of the decade and even earlier than that, but it was not as grave of a concern. Since 1974, the CIA had contacts in the Middle East that gave them great intel on terrorist activities until 1978 when it lost Ali Hassan Salameh, chief of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Weiner, 2008, 449-50). American intelligence was once again in the dark, and has been ever since. American resentments were already brewing. After

the hostage crisis, it increased dramatically. "After the 1979 Islamic revolution [Iran] quickly became the world's leading state supporter of terrorism," Byman (2008) writes. . Iran seeks to spread the Islamic message of purging all corruption from the world. It has supported groups including al Qaeda from Lebanon to the Philippines. After the Revolution, the United States imposed sanctions on Iran for its support of terrorism, and these continue to present day, also creating nonpolitical relations with the State (Byman 2008).

In 1985, Lebanese Shiites took five Americans hostage. No amount of negotiating with the Ayatollah Khomeini would release them. That year, the CIA was approached with an offer to sell arms to Iran to attempt to improve relations (Casey had no intentions of doing so) and fund their war against Iraq. Negotiating the hostages' release became a top priority. After Israel was allowed to sell some of its American arms to Iran, the U.S. did so soon after. In 1984, Dictator Adolfo Calero of Nicaragua met with Col. Oliver North in a series of meetings to further the assistance of the *contras* against the Sandistas. Prados (1986) wrote, "Reagan was willing to do anything necessary to ensure success at contra military force." After Congress had passed the Boland Amendment, which made it illegal for the United States to aid the Nicaraguan forces in any way, Reagan's message to America that it would not tolerate nor aid terrorists operations proceeded. Col. North was the mastermind behind the plan in what was to become the Iran-Contra scandal (Prados 1986, 424-26). The U.S was accomplishing two tasks at the same time, by using funds from the Iranian arms sales to free the hostages; the United States could fund the *contras*. Casey was at first apprehensive of the idea, but eventually, he and Reagan worked very closely with Col. North to orchestrate the money laundering. The United States was also providing battle plans to Iraq in their war against Iran. When Iran made the same request, John McMahon, deputy director of intelligence, offered Casey an eerie prophecy. He

warned that the CIA was "aiding and abetting the wrong people. Providing defensive missiles was one thing, but when we provide intelligence on the order of battle, we are giving the Iranians the wherewithal for offensive action." Casey ignored the message and it was business as usual (qtd. in Weiner 2008, 468).

Iraq

The year 1980 marked the beginning of the second longest Gulf War in modern history. Iraq invaded Iran in an effort to assert its regional dominance. By 1982, Iraq was put on the offensive and was being driven back. In order to see Iran lose the war, the United States saw a vested interest in supporting Iraq and its President, Saddam Hussein. Such support came in the form of ammunition, vehicles, cluster bombs as well as financial aid and credits. These supplies were no doubt turned on the U.S. army in the next decade. Casey and Reagan were adamant about ensuring the Iraqi victory over Iran but at the same time condemning the use of chemical or nuclear weapons, as Battle (2003) reveals. These were used on Iraqi dissidents, and very sparingly in actual warfare.

When the war did end, Kuwait refused to forgive its debt on Saddam Hussein for assisting in campaigns against the Iranians. Tense negotiations followed between Saddam, President H.W. Bush and Gorbachev. Negotiations fell apart and Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. The United States responded in Operation Desert Storm, driving Saddam back and ending a decade long alliance.

After the end of the first Gulf War, sources poured in saying Saddam had WMDs and the CIA accepted these sources of intel as hard fact. As the CIA had done in the past, it continued to blindly accept information from defectors to confirm their preconceived notions of an impending war. Over an eight year period, the CIA collected empty information; little to none of it was

true. Saddam had told the U.S. he had destroyed his weapons but left the facilities to produce them open. The United States knew he was lying. This distrust would set the stage for the U.S-Iraqi relations in the years to come. But Weiner (2008) says Saddam's actions can be justified. It was a way for Saddam to be a good leader and save his country, even if he had to lie to do it. Iraq was weak after two wars and piling debt, and if its enemies knew it was defenseless, that left the nation prone to attack. Saddam had to deceive the world at large to make himself seem more resilient and protect his citizens (Weiner 2008, 564-7).

Tenet's faulty intelligence and preconceived notions resulted in the biggest military flounder since the Vietnam War. President Bush heavily campaigned for unilateral aggression to depose Saddam. His plans went from utopian diplomacy and implementing democracy to military action with few in between. Despite having little concrete action to offer as to what would happen to the Iraqi state after Saddam was gone, Bush declared Operation Iraqi Freedom in March of 2003. Its mission was to run Saddam out of Iraq. But after Saddam left, the country fell into lawlessness and chaos with no one to take charge. The United States did send humanitarian aid to help refugees and U.S. troops that remained were given the task of training Iraqi police and military so they could defend themselves. In January of 2004, intelligence intercepted a letter written from al-Zarqawi, al Qaeda militant leader in Iraq, which called for collective action from the Shia against the United States, igniting the secretarian war. Insurgency gained momentum and the War on Terror spread to include Iraq until the Operation ended in 2011. Today, the country is in the same category with Somalia; it is no closer to progress. "The country has become something close to a failed state," Parker (2012) stated. It cannot provide basic services like running water, and in the political realm, there is no single

party. It is instead divided between Sunni and Shi'ites and the country is locked in fighting over who will gain control (Parker 2012, 94).

The Intelligence-Presidential Complex

Through the legacies of Tenet and Casey and the presidents they served, the United States experienced the worst attack on its soil since Pearl Harbor; what we are left with today is a War on Terror that cannot be contained. Casey and Reagan's close correspondence would prove the most influential. They were able to focus foreign policy efforts, and achieve some temporary success in Afghanistan, regardless of how it has affected us today (we must remember that without foresight, success is defined by a goal that achieves its purpose).

On the contrary, President Clinton and DCI James Woolsey had no relationship. He would infamously say, "I didn't have a bad relationship with the president, I just didn't have one at all" (qtd. in Weiner 2008, 508). Clinton's disdain for Woolsey as DCI would lend largely in part to his short tenure; he would only last two years at the Agency, accomplishing nothing significant. The relationship between President Bush and Tenet was a close one—at face value. "Bush and Tenet met at the White House almost every morning…" Weiner (2008) recounts, "But nothing Tenet said about bin Laden captured the president's attention…Bush was interested in other things…He was struck by no sense of emergency" (Weiner 2008, 552-3). Few would speculate that Bush and Tenet would not get along well. Bush, a Republican, inherited Tenet, who had a history of association with Democrats. In the years before 9/11, Tenet tried desperately to get the President to pay attention to Afghanistan. The more he tried to "ring the alarm," as Helms had once put it, the more he was shut him out. In the years after the attacks, Tenet flooded the White House of false reports of Saddam having WMDs. Whereas the White House would fail in preventing 9/11, the CIA failed in preventing the next Iraq war. It was an

even exchange with deadly consequences. The President's and the CIA's agendas did not coincide, and so the failures of the Agency would persist. A correspondence was not the same as co-operation. The burden of mistake in going into Iraq rests squarely in the space between Tenet and President Bush. Success in American foreign policy lies in the co-operation between the White House and the Director of Intelligence. The DCI must be regarded highly in the White House if operations are to be successful. Though the CIA was initially supposed to be above political influence—and it still can be—if it is to be successful in its mission to protect America, it must rethink its research. Finding and tweaking analyses to support policy will continue to lead to failures and blowback.

Preventing "Blowback"

The CIA defines its term "blowback" as the result of covert operations kept from the American public, so that if and when retaliation occurs, Americans cannot put it into context. An attack appears "out of the blue," and our response to it appears patriotic rather than defensive (Previewh 2006). It began in Afghanistan against the most frightful enemy the country had known. The CIA armed, trained and funded its own enemy. In the early 1990s, inaction to withdraw troops created a foreboding sentiment in the Arab world—one of distrust. That distrust eventually culminated in militant attacks, flag burnings and the attack of 9/11 traced to an enemy once believed to be the most auspicious of its day. Knowing no bounds, the United States' effort to eliminate this enemy spilt over into neighboring Pakistan. Frequent drone strikes, despite their success, have angered Pakistanis because they are largely unauthorized and they terrorize citizens. And in doing so, we have undermined their political and geographical sovereignty. In retaliation, they welcome the Taliban and al Qaeda, in turn undermining our mission in the War on Terror. So then, it seems, it is a paradox. If the Pakistanis weren't to house our enemies, the

United States would have no imperative to encroach on their borders. Our relations would be much stronger, and thus co-operation in stabilizing Afghanistan would be stronger.

The beginnings of international terrorism lie in Iran. It is also the closest relationship between the latter and how the Agency's operations have backfired so severely. Though terrorism was nothing new in the late 1970s, after the Iranian Revolution, it was certainly validated. Iran's isolation through American sanctions in turn created a Mecca for radical Islamists. The sanctions also created Iranian autarky, which produced a need for generating its own power, and nuclear energy was found to be the most efficient, spurning condemnation from many nations in present day.

The Agency's support of ruthless dictators has obviously proven to be a haunting policy, but to say that Iraq was a direct result of the CIA's operations as well, while apparent, cannot be linked so easily. It is true that in Saddam Hussein aiding financially and militarily in his war against the Iranians, the United States was in an area that looked like trouble to begin with. The time between the First Persian Gulf war and Operation Desert Storm was unpredictable until it was too late. The CIA did not think that Saddam would invade Kuwait until literally the day that it happened. But looking at it from an economic perspective, Kuwait's refusal to forgive Saddam his debts (they had every right not to) would ultimately lead to some sort of friction. Further, showing that the war on terrorism was justified in Iraq is a misnomer. The Bush administration led Americans to believe that al Qaeda was there before 9/11. Rather, al Qaeda came to Iraq in response to the deposing of Saddam in an effort to impose Sharia, or Islamic law. U.S. troops were misdirected in focusing only on training the police force. Clearly, a nation in chaos needs a police force to maintain order and a government without a legitimate presence cannot, in turn, present a legitimate military. Bush should have improved the police and the

government simultaneously, rather than hoping democracy would take hold. Not enough deliberation was taken before deposing Saddam. Bush's response to Iraq created a similar circumstance to that of the late Vietnam War. An immature military could not suppress that of an unpredictable, relentless enemy. But neither can the United States' advanced military. So the problem is not in with what weapons the war is fought, but the battle being waged in the minds of the enemy, on which we still do not have a full grasp.

And so the war is no longer confined to Afghanistan or Iraq, nor is the war over. Citing President Bush in his address to the nation after the September 11 attacks, Bach (2009) recalls: "'[t]he only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows'" (*www.hsaj.org* 3). When the enemy spreads, the war follows them. Kraxberger (2005) acknowledges that after September 11, United States' attention on Africa has begun to resurface. Since 1994 and the fiascos in Mogadishu, Somalia; Rwanda and Sudan, U.S. foreign policy in Africa has been almost nil. In recent years, terrorism has been the initiating agenda for conducting foreign policy in sub-Saharan Africa. Poverty and corruption serve as breeding grounds where Islam is already an integral part of society. When the government's legitimacy is diminished, conflict erupts and Islamism has an opportunity to flourish in an effort to restore order (Kraxberger 2005, 55-7). In the news today, they have been most prominent in northern Mali where ethnic and tribal conflict has separated the country into northern and southern regions. Somalia, declared a failed state in 1991, is also a port for terrorism and pirates in the region. Some research also suggests that illegal blood diamond operations provide funding for various organizations, let alone local thugs and warlords across the African continent.

Some might even say that fighting terrorism is as futile a war as the "war on drugs." It will always exist. As our relentlessness to terrorism increases, so too does the enemies' resistance to supposed American imperialism. After the Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet empire crumbled, there was confusion in the Central Intelligence Agency. For the past generation, their mission had been to defeat an enemy they could not penetrate. Now that they were gone, what was it? Nearly as a direct result of their operations, when the Twin Towers fell, the CIA had their new mission, and the American people had a new fear; the Soviets became the terrorists of today. But yet, we must emphasize: without diligence, no one could have foreseen the events that transpired. Even for a spy agency, the future is far from predictable. But since its inception, the Agency has gone beyond analyzing and collecting data. It has tried to shape foreign policy the way they wanted it to be through dictators, coups and secret wars. Government must react to the events of today in order to preserve tomorrow and prevent yesterday from happening again.

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