

Capitalist Carnage in the Middle East

The rate of progress of events in the Middle East has reached a dazzling speed. Each new day presents us with yet another banner headline announcing a new massacre, outrage, slaughter or intervention. For many, events in that region are a bewildering Chinese puzzle populated by a myriad of religious sects, races, nationalities run by collections of Mafia-like Godfathers all busy murdering each other to seemingly, little purpose. However this is precisely how our capitalist masters wish us to think. If we can relegate the slaughter of the millions who have died in this region to the realms of fantasy, or as the responsibility of madmen, or religious loonies then we can be diverted away from seeking to understand why such events are occurring. For, any reasoned look at these events, once we have removed all the smokescreen, reveals unerringly that the strings on these puppets, these perpetrators of massacres, of outrages, of terrorist attacks, these private armies, are held not by tinpot dictators or mad mullahs, but ultimately by the leading capitalist governments of the two world capitalist blocs. A close look at the barbarism now firmly entrenched in the Middle East shows who the real culprits really are - the power hungry imperialisms of Moscow and Washington who are in turn faithfully served in doling out death in the region by their clients and junior partners of their capitalist alliances.

This article makes no pretence at being a history of the Middle East. Such a work would require many many pages. All that is attempted here is to try to steer a path through the murk to attempt to discern the thread which connects so many seemingly unconnected events. It cannot hope even to give any kind of depth to analyses of the effects of imperialist domination in even a single country where the shifts of power, change of bloc etc have been so widespread and violent in so many countries since World War Two. All it can do is seek to explain the intent of the two world capitalist blocs in their endeavours to subordinate the area and all the regimes therein to their interest and to have them do their bidding. In this they have used all the weapons, economic, political and military, in their power.

Similarly we can give little space to the history of class struggle in the region since WW 2 much as we would have liked to spend some time on the implications of the results of such struggles. All we can do is to attempt to show the importance of the proletariat in the region and to show the main ideological weapons used by the bourgeoisie against the workers and other classes. More, we can show that, in true dialectical fashion, the very ideological weapons used, along with the deepening of the world crisis, has created, and continues to create, a situation which the two bloc are finding increasingly difficult to control DESPITE the fact that for over thirty years they have been able to mobilise the population of the region for war and slaughter and have persuaded generation after generation of workers and peasants to murder each other in the defence of capitalism east or west.

Moreover such an understanding leads directly to the realisation that the weapons they use to conduct such slaughters, to gull the millions of the Middle East are precisely the weapons they have in store for workers throughout the globe as their capitalist economy crumbles and the bourgeoisie more and more face up to the need to mobilise the whole world for war and massacre.

Workers have many lessons to learn from the course of imperialist activity in the Middle East and the area has the clearest expressions of the barbarism of decadent capital. It is up to us to learn those lessons if we are to intervene where the proletariat is strong and where the victory over world capitalism must be sought.

The Middle East serves to highlight many important facets of the confrontation between the blocs since it lies directly between them in a potentially strategic position and has been a hotbed of their intrigues since the last great redistribution of territory and resources after the last great imperialist war.

Strengths and Weaknesses Carrots and Sticks.

We must start with basic assumptions about the strengths and weaknesses of the two blocs headed respectively by the USA and the USSR. For it is by understanding their respective strengths and weaknesses that we can best comprehend why they have pursued certain strategies not only in the Middle East, both vis a vis each other but also towards their client states, but throughout the world,

wherever they compete with and confront each other. For the two blocs and the two bloc leaders have different strengths and weaknesses. The western bloc, led by America, has, even in the throes of capitalist crisis, enormous economic and financial resources, far greater than Russia even though Russia has far greater direct control of the economic means at its disposal. It has far fewer economic means and depends to a far greater extent on the sheer military power it can present for its power over its satellites as well as the abused legacy of the revolutionary wave of 1917, which experience it can refer to in its dealings with those brutalised under a western regime.

Both blocs use a combination of carrot and stick, both to control their dependant capitals and to seek to take control over the dependant capitals of the opposing bloc. The carrots and sticks may differ depending on their respective strengths and weaknesses but their use is the key to understanding the seemingly contradictory activities of the blocs.

Given the much stronger economic base of the west the USA has, where possible and necessary, attempted to use the carrot of economic aid, loans, grants etc. to secure the adhesion of regimes to the west. One only has to consider the vast sums of money in the form of credit and grant, counted in the hundreds of billions of dollars which the USA either itself, or through the medium of the World Bank or the IMF has poured into such dependant capitals as Brazil, Mexico and Argentina et alia (to point to but one part of one continent) so as to tie these states to the western bloc and to incorporate their bourgeoisies into the west's system of exploitation of the areas inhabitants. However this is not to say that the west is unwilling to use its considerable military muscle to achieve its ends either in the form of armed interventions such as in Cuba or Zaire, where, for various reasons, it has been unable to find a suitable regime to do its bidding by economic muscle or by the creation of indigenous forces to terrorise the population into a state where they are unable to confront their exploitation such as in Guatemala and Thailand. However by and large its principal tactic has been to seek to subvert, if necessary, some section, if not all of the local bourgeoisie, of the states it seeks to control either by making them handsome offers or by supporting rival factions in an attempt to oust them from power, replacing them with a more compliant pack of wolves. Since WW2 the USA has staged literally dozens of coups in small countries, and in not a few large ones. But this number is surpassed by far by the number of states where economic muscle has prevailed and where the local bourgeoisie has been handsomely cut in on the exploitation of the country by the USA. From the Shah to Pinochet we have seen a succession of bourgeois thugs installed at US behest and from Mexico to Turkey we have seen regimes of a variety of hues survive as dependents of the USA and the

western bloc supported by the economic might of western capitalism. By this means the west has managed to retain control of the majority of the states of the world. In many cases there has not even needed to be a change of regimes. One need only recall the move of China into the western bloc to see a very visible example of the success of such tactics.

However the barbarism of such exploitative regimes inevitably produces fractions of the bourgeoisie cut out of the distribution of favours, and excluded from a share in the exploitation of the inhabitants, and it is from these fractions of the bourgeoisie that the Russians have sought to change the orientation of western satellites.

The USA, of course, does not carry out such activities alone. In many areas of the world it utilises its junior partners such as Britain and France, especially in those areas where, due to their colonialist past, they were responsible for installing the local regimes in the first place. Thus France 'runs' the network of regimes controlling those parts of West Africa where she previously ruled directly just as the British still play an important role in policing, economically at any rate, their former Commonwealth (sic)

The Soviet Strategy

The Russians don't have anything like the economic wherewithal of the west. Their economic weakness is starkly shown by the fact that their economic strength is not even sufficient to hold down their junior partners in Eastern Europe, let alone minor states elsewhere. If the local regimes in Bulgaria and Rumania for instance were to be tied to Russia by economic strings only they would have long ago felt the tug of economic rationale to the west, towards economic viability as the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968 proved. It is a truism that only the massed divisions of the Russian Army permanently stationed in East Germany, Poland etc. etc. prevent the logic of capitalism producing such a move. (The fact that 'communist' Yugoslavia is a member of the western bloc and that 'communist' Albania is a client of, of all places, China, is directly attributable to the fact that there have never been Soviet Divisions in these 'communist' countries.) Any slackening of military control over its satellites would inevitably mean their eventual defection. Thus in trying to maintain its dominance over its clients or in attempts to supplant western control in any state or region Russia's economic strengths is utterly inadequate to compete with that of the west. In such situations soviet rule and success is dependant, just as in Eastern Europe, on military muscle. Success in taking over states from the USA has inevitably been due to military effort not economic subversion. In the main it has come about by the support of anti-western national liberation struggles against the brutal

western compradore regimes place, such as in Cuba, Ethiopia and Vietnam using the supply of military hardware and the stance of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism to aid the ousting of western regimes and their replacement with avowed state capitalist ones. Even in areas and states where they have not yet been successful they have managed to 'keep the pot boiling' in the hope of future success and to force the western regime to expend valuable resources in never ending military confrontations with the pro-Russian factions.

To date Russia has managed to 'take over' only a few states from the west outwith Eastern Europe but they are strategically located in the centre of whole regions and as such affect all the states surrounding them. Cuba affects the whole of Central America; Ethiopia is a source of disruption for the whole of East Africa; Angola has the same affect in the East and Libya in the North while Vietnam threatens the stability of every western regime in South East Asia:

Russia's main problem, however, has often been that where their clients succeed their continued rule is subject to the same economic conditions as their predecessors and thus on a rate of exploitation and amount of economic aid similar to those they have ousted from power and, given the difficulty of providing sufficient aid to such regimes, the Russians have found that such countries have often been tempted back into the western bloc by promises of resources such as those supplied the last regime. One need only look at the cost to Russia of keeping the tattered Cuban economy afloat to see their difficulties. For it is one thing to supply small arms to a budding guerrilla group but quite another to maintain a capitalist infrastructure in a period of deepening capitalist crisis.

Indeed it could be argued that the Russians, rather than seeking to extend their network of client states are seeking only to place them in key areas and to extend the conflict to neighbouring states not with the intention of capturing them but merely of bleeding them and forcing their continued support by the west to be as costly as possible.

On a world scale therefore the western bloc has sought to encircle the Russian Empire with a ring of client states forcing, at a military level, the Russians to divert substantial numbers of troops and military resources away from the projected cockpit of WW3, Western Europe, to the defence of their eastern and southern borders. The Russian response has been to act upon the repression of western compradore regimes to subvert them by means of anti-colonialist and national liberation mythologies so as to either overthrow them, allowing pro-soviet regimes to further penetrate western dominated areas or to force the west to divert their forces away from Russia itself to deal with potential trouble spots

scattered throughout the globe. For as the capitalist crisis deepens so too will the barbarity of the regimes as they desperately seek to retain control as the profitability of world capitalism and thus the infrastructure of peripheral economies is destroyed.

The Middle East

It is within this context that we can examine precisely how the two blocs have faced up to one another in this key area, the Middle East. We may note three areas where we should hope to gain insights into the dynamic of decadent capitalism.

- 1) How the two blocs compete with one another. The tactics they employ and the weapons they use; their respective strengths and weaknesses, their successes and failures.
- 2) How the local bourgeoisies and their regimes operate both within and between the blocs; how such local states have their own imperialist drives, however futile, and their own need to dominate and bleed their own populations; how they are affected by the inter imperialist rivalry and are utilised by it.
- 3) The weapons that the bourgeoisie, both local and global, use against the local populations in an attempt to force them to accept the misery of their decaying capitalist regimes and to drag them into local and regional wars by dividing them against themselves. Such weapons as nationalism and religion give us a keen insight into the dangers for workers not only in the Middle East but also in the industrial heartlands, for the world bourgeoisie will not discard weapons it has successfully used in an area but will turn to them again as the collapse of their system extends further and further throughout the world.

Controlling the Region

The attempt to control the Middle East by the West rested on two pillars, one in the east of the region and one in the west.

Iran under the Shah

The main western thrust over on the eastern flank of the region, bordering the southern, 'soft underbelly' of the Soviet Union was the building up of the power of the state of Iran under the Shah both to be the principle gendarme for the west in that area and as a strong military power strategically located facing Russia in an area which lay far removed from the main centres of Soviet population and industrial strength and at the end of very long and inadequate supply routes for the Russians. Threatening the Russians here on their exposed flank when generalised hostilities broke out would force the Russians to permanently locate in this region a disproportionate number of troops. In local terms the Iranian

army would and did serve as a shield for the Gulf states, threaten any of the local regimes who stepped out of line and protect the oil routes to the west.

Immediately after WW2 the neutralist/leftist regime of Mossadeq and his allies of the Tudeh party who sought closer links with the Russians were eliminated by a CIA sponsored coup which placed the Cossack Pahlavi dynasty back in power and for almost thirty years the Shah remained in power backed by one of the most powerful, largest and certainly most modern armed forces the region has seen. Iran also served to deter the many troublesome nationalities excluded from power in the carveups which followed both WW1 and WW2 from upsetting the status quo.

The Israeli Threat

The second major pillar was the creation of and continued support for the Zionist state of Israel which has only managed to survive thus far due to the massive influx of capital from the USA. At present only one third of its yearly budget comes from its own resources; a further third comes in the form of loans from the USA and the remaining third as free grant from the same source.

For over thirty years the existence of the military power of Israel, just like the Shah has been a key factor in the domination of the Middle East by the West. By using the mythology of Zionism and the poison of nationalism on the Israeli proletariat the US and the West has time and again enforced its dictat on the region by military means, using the Israeli army on the forces of the local bourgeoisies of the region. In the early years this was a formidable counter to the bourgeois forces of arab nationalism which attempted to harness the discontent of the arab population with western colonial rule. Unable to harness such nationalism for itself, since it was directed against it, the West was able to use the Israeli fear of being swamped by hostile arab forces to build up the Israeli armed forces into a formidable military machine for imposing their dictat on the region and one which would periodically batter the hell out of adjacent arab countries in an attempt to force them to toe the line. Paradoxically however this crude form of social control had the unwanted effect of merely intensifying not only anti-Israeli feeling among the arab population but, given the close and obvious links between Israel and the USA, also anti-western in general and anti-US feeling in particular. Inevitably many of these arab states were thrust into the clutches of the Russians. With the abject failure of the pro-western arab regimes which held power in the late Forties to mask their dependence on Israel's chief backers it was inevitable that they would be ousted in most arab states involved in war with Israel

and replaced by regimes committed to revitalising the military power of the region and more able to harness arab nationalist feeling for their support.

After the utter failure of the Arab armies in the 1948 attempt to destroy Israel King Farouk was ousted in Egypt by a revolt of the junior ranks of the army led by Gamel Abd al-Nasir while the immediate effect of the Suez war of 1956 was the taking of power in Syria by the Ba'athists although even before that war there had been a joint military command between Syria and Egypt. These two regimes subsequently formed the United Arab Republic.

Iraq which had, along with Jordan and Lebanon been a bastion of western influence in the area under Nuri experienced a series of coups from Qasim's in 1958 where the King and Nuri were slaughtered through regimes led by Arif, the Ba'ath et alia, each progressively less stable and more inclined to lean towards the Russians whenever sufficient aid was not forthcoming from the west; and each more dependent on nationalist and anti-colonialist feeling to ensure their continuance.

The west's response to this series of coups, culminating in Qasim's coup in Iraq was to warn the new regimes against trying to extend their rule to other states in the region. The Iraqi coup had certainly surprised the west. As Eisenhower said in July 1958.

"This was the country that we were counting on heavily as a bulwark of stability and progress in the region."

More practically the US Marines landed in Chamoun's Lebanon and British paratroopers flew into Amman in a concrete demonstration of western support for their clients.

This stemmed the rot, and forced the west to speed up the build-up of Iran as the gendarme for the east of the region. Those regimes which had ousted pro-western cliques were forced more and more to ensure their survival by reversing existing western economic arrangements, especially in the oilfields and forced to take up more of an anti-Israeli stance if they were to survive however much economic reality led them to try to reach a profitable compromise with the west. In order to control their own populations they had to, verbally at least, oppose the Zionist state. Such a situation inevitably made them receptive to the military blandishments of Russia throughout the Fifties and Sixties. Egypt and Syria developed a military capability as part of an increasingly subservient alliance with Russia, however much they attempted to play one side off against the other, so that they could assuage their populations and ensure their own survival by the military defeat and eradication of Israel. Time and again however they set such wars in motion only to be smashed by the far superior Israeli forces.

By the Seventies however the onset once more of capitalism's difficulties world-wide forced the USA and the western bloc to realise that this form of control was becoming increasingly counter-productive and dangerous. As events moved towards military confrontation once again in the early Seventies a continued commitment to periodic wars in the Middle East not only threatened the very existence of the state of Israel whose forces had to be continually beefed up as Arab strength increased with every new military mission from the USSR, (as the much better performance by Egyptian and Syrian forces in the Yom Kippur War was to show) but also was creating a more and more difficult situation for the remaining western regimes, especially in the vital Gulf area. In addition the remaining neutrals, in reality regimes who because of their location were able to balance themselves between the blocs, taking aid from both and able to do so since each bloc feared that cutting it would thrust them into the opposing alliance were, due to increasing anti-US and Israeli feeling threatened with supporting the attacks on Israel or falling.

In such circumstances the US sought, by use of its economic strength to put forward such a juicy carrot to key states that it would have the effect of drawing the teeth of the anti Israeli alliance by ensuring the defection of key states and thus preventing any possibility of a war in the Middle East which might destroy Israel and allow the Russians to dominate the area.

Egypt Moves West

Using its economic strength therefore in the form of massive financial inducements the US directly pulled the Egyptians completely out of the Soviet orbit. Since the death of Nasser his successor Sadat had been keeping power only at the cost of diverting discontent by declaring that he would attack Israel 'next year'. After a few years of this and a badly declining economy effected by the bypassing of the Suez canal by the large supertankers from the Gulf his request to the USSR for the modern military equipment necessary to finish the Israelis was refused. Sadat, while still taking supplies from Russia expelled his Russian advisors and responded enthusiastically to the American offers. Sadat's efforts in the Yom Kippur War in 1973 was a direct attempt not merely to inflict a defeat on Israel and to use up his Soviet hardware but also to 'up the ante' on his defection west. As far as the Americans were concerned his defeat and their willingness to stop Sharon's armour from taking Cairo vindicated their policy and Sadat took the route to Camp David in exchange for a level of support which in 1984 will reach, per annum, \$750 million in economic aid and \$465 million in military aid. At a stroke therefore the US had pulled away the main prop of the Soviet Union's policy in the region. But the US did not stop there.

Enter the Saudis

Although America in person, because of the anti western feeling rife in the Middle East, was unable to be seen to intervene directly outwith Egypt, through its junior partners in the western alliance it sought to carry out the same tactic elsewhere in the region. It had already bought the support of Hussein in Jordan using British and latterly Saudi money, to the extent that Hussein had willingly slaughtered some 20,000 Palestinians in the notorious Black September operation in 1970 and now the Saudis were to be promoted to a more senior role in the west's attempts to subordinate its erstwhile opponents in the area. Funds were filtered to Iraq and even Syria in an attempt to persuade them with the carrot of economic aid but the main focus of attention outwith Egypt was the attempt to pull the PLO itself and El Fatah under Yassir Arafat in particular away from Russia. Arafat, a relative of the Mufti of Jerusalem who had been a prominent leader in the 1948 war was zealously courted by the Saudis, offered finance

Yassir Arafat



Westward Bound

and aid, and by 1976 at the latest was firmly and clearly in the western camp. Adroit politician that he is however it would have been fatal to have made this clear to his still rabidly anti western fighters and while setting up training camps in Qatar and basing himself in Algiers, he has continued to blame the Americans for everything while distancing himself from the Russians and their clients Syria while quietly pocketing Saudi gold.

The effort aimed at Iraq wasnt considered very important since the US still had the big Iranian stick ready and no one in Washington saw any need to finance a regime which might fall at any time and where the carrot wasnt necessary. However serious attempts were made, with Saudi money to persuade Syria that her best interests weren't being served by a Soviet alliance. Indeed the fragility of the Alawite regime of Assad was

such that the attempt nearly succeeded, especially after the disaster of Yom Kippur but, it seems, the inability of the west to pull a recalcitrant Israel off the Golan Heights, barely 16 miles from Damascus forced Assad to stay with Russia and plan for a further war to secure his borders.

It must be said therefore that these slight setbacks notwithstanding, the US effort to control this part of the Middle East had certainly borne fruit. With Egypt now a pliant tool supporting US intentions not only over the Suez but also in the confrontation with Gaddafi in Libya and with the Ethiopian regime further south, and with the PLO now well on the way to military and political castration and due after some mopping up operations in their present refuge The Lebanon, to be lost in some desert prison camp being prepared for them as the 'Jordanian' option proposed by the Saudis, the carrots proffered needed only to be backed up by the Israeli stick aimed at the PLO and Syria to ensure the exclusion of the Russians from the entire region. However things didn't quite work out as Washington intended.

By the late Seventies the world wide crisis of capital was placing tremendous strains on all these arrangements, requiring more and more funding at a time when less and less credit was available. Capitalism globally was forced into a policy of austerity and this austerity affected especially those regimes with less economic viability and thus more of a need to squeeze their populations as things got tougher.

Exit the Shah

Thus the dynamic of capitalist decay worldwide had as a direct consequence the fall of the Shah, a collapse in which the Iranian proletariat played a leading part which was subsequently diverted into the reactionary dead-end of support for the Mullahs in their attempt to wrest Iran out of the orbit of the Twentieth Century altogether and return to the Middle Ages. At a stroke one of the key bastions of Western power and influence in the Middle East disappeared, and although these events did not lead immediately to an anti-western regime in Iran, let alone a pro-Russian one, such was the state of confusion that Russian influence was able initially to penetrate the area via its front organisations like the Tudeh and the various pro-Soviet nationalist groupings in the area. With the collapse of the West's gendarme an alarming hole in the pattern of western domination was left. The threat to Russia's southern border disappeared and the Russians were able to take a much stronger line in its client states like Afghanistan and vis a vis the nascent nationalist guerrilla groupings throughout the region due to the loss of the policing role the Shah had handled for the west.

The potential for the expansion of Soviet influence

in the area was thus greater than it had been for decades if the West didnt manage to control the deteriorating situation. More particularly a new gendarme for the area was needed and a new candidate for the job appeared in the person of the Iraqis. The regime in power there had, as previously described, been trying to extract maximum advantage by playing both sides at once, getting military and economic aid from both sides and although little valued by either the Russians or the West had managed to keep a measure of autonomy - or at least as much as the enmity of Iran allowed. The Iraqis immediately put in for the Iranian franchise and declared their willingness thus to not merely wholeheartedly join the western bloc but, in return for sufficient aid, to take on both the external and internal policing role the Shah had had. To prove it could handle such responsibility it responded to the victory of Khomeini by invading Iran, with Saudi support, in an attempt not only to show their worth but also to discipline the Iranian bourgeoisie. The Iraqis themselves sought to clear the Gulf and take control of areas taken from them by the Shah in which effort they were prompted by the Saudis who were clearly concerned at the turbulence of the Arab populations of the area.

The Saudis, it must be remembered, rule tiny states largely populated by Shiite immigrant workers who are specifically excluded from the oil wealth. Similarly Iraq has a large Shiite minority.

However, for the Americans, humiliated by their hostage recovery farce, the Iraqi invasion was a classic example of the carrot/stick approach used this time towards Iran. They can have had few illusions about the capabilities of the Iraqis in their attempt to oust Khomeini but, they must have reasoned, any damage the Iraqis did would force the Iranian bourgeoisie to moderate their tone, cease their threatening behaviour towards the Gulf States and realise that economic recovery could only come from a renewed dependence on the West. It would also in the short term focus Iranian attention against Iraq and not against the vital Gulf States. The utter failure of the Iraqi offensive and the hysteria of the rants of the Mullahs against Great Satan (the USA) filled the West with profound disquiet therefore. The war merely consolidated the power of Khomeini and the Mullahs further isolating those in the Iranian bourgeoisie who sought an accomodation with the West and threatening, with the possibility of the defeat of Iraq and the capture of Baghdad, not merely the collapse of the Iraqi regime but its replacement by a Shiite regime committed, like Khomeini to an extension of messianic rule throughout the region and the replacement of the 'godless' regimes of the Gulf.

Massive transfusions of finance and military equipment from Saudi Arabia and France stemmed

'the Iranian tide however while the USA kept well out of any direct supply of arms so as not to harden further Iranian attitudes towards them. The war was thus stabilised on the borders. Though such a situation has allowed the Russians to reemerge as a potential supplier of arms to Iraq the main effects has greatly favoured the West. The drain of the war on the shattered economy of Iran has forced the Iranian bourgeoisie to face up to reality and has driven them to reform their links with the west in which effort Japan and other 'safe' junior partners in western Capitalism have been playing a prominent part in recent months.

The elimination of the Tudeh party and the slaughter of thousands of its militants stands testimony to the realisation in Iran that the Russians couldn't come up with the goods and was a bloody testimony to the Iranian committment to mend their ways. The Russians of course had hoped that continued war would allow them to influence Iran via arms grants allowing the Tudeh to persuade Iran on a more leftwards and pro-Soviet path (and this

also explains the reluctance of Russia to provoke specifically anti-Iranian nationalist groupings) but now the situation looks irretrievable for Moscow. All that is needed now is for Khomeini to die, an event which cant be far away, and the bourgeoisie in Iran will tread a more 'realistic' path into the arms of American capitalism. We can expect a regime in Iran which, while still probobly mouthing anti US slogans is busy making deals with western states and trying once more to take up a profitable position within the constellation of American clients.

Ingram.

part two of this article will appear in the next issue of the Bulletin and will look at recent events in the Lebanon before analysing the key ideological weapons used by the bourgeoisie against the peoples of the Middle East.

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