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European Public Opinion and Nuclear Weapons

1. I have been impressed in recent months by the apparent disparity in public attitudes here and on the Continent towards nuclear weapons; according to most indicators, opinion in the Northern sphere (the FRG, Benelux and the UK) is considerably more hostile than in their Southern neighbours, particularly France and Italy.

/ 2. I attach a copy of a paper by FCO officials which describes the reasons for this anti-nuclear sentiment in Europe, and for the apparent differences in its extent in particular countries. The paper also suggests some lessons to be learned from these differences, and from the overall public attitude.

3. I am reluctant to add to the material already being prepared by officials for the meeting of OD(D) on 14 December. But since the present paper is relevant to our discussions about arms control and disarmament, I believe that it could provide some useful further background.

4. I am sending a copy of this minute (and its attachment) to Michael Heseltine, Richard Luce, John Stanley and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

9 December 1983

EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Summary of FCO paper

1. Western Europe is neither neutralist nor anti-NATO. But public opposition to nuclear weapons has grown perceptibly in recent years, with differences of degree in individual countries.
2. In general, the growing opposition stems from a perception and therefore fear of the increased risk of a nuclear war; an increase in anti-American feeling; and the impact of the recession on public readiness to accept continued growth in defence spending. Public fears are related to misunderstandings about NATO's defence strategy, to misjudgements in Washington, to lack of results from arms control, and to the perceived decline in East-West relations.
3. Apart from general socio-political differences between Northern and Southern European countries, differences in the extent of anti-nuclear sentiment can be explained in terms of: political changes throughout Western Europe (with parties of the left going into Opposition in the North but into Government in the South); contrary effects of anti-American feeling in individual countries; and wider discrepancies in social and religious attitudes. Factors particular to each country are discussed in greater detail in the Annex to

the paper.

4. The lessons to be learned are more applicable to general trends than to specific differences:

(i) a strong and united Alliance can succeed in carrying its point with the electorate;

(ii) public opinion needs to be better educated in matters of defence policy;

(iii) we should trade more on the strong support for NATO membership and for multilateral disarmament. Our commitment to NATO is not a generous gesture to other Allies but the best way of preserving our own security;

(iv) practical and theoretical objections to the way in which the INF strategy developed over the period 1979-83 must be set against the immediate political arguments for the course that was pursued;

(v) the US Administration must be convinced of the need for greater consistency in their policies, and the Europeans must make greater efforts to ensure that their own views are taken into account in Washington;

(vi) public reassurance about the direction of defence policy, and confidence in US leadership must be re-established. The resumption of a realistic East-West dialogue would make a notable contribution to this;

(vii) success in arms control can also play a part.

Public opinion must not get the impression that the arms

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race is running out of control. But the arms control
process cannot be a substitute for better East-West
relations.

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EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

I.Introduction

1. Western Europe is neither neutralist nor anti-NATO. Governments continue to support basic defence doctrines of the Alliance. But public opinion has shown a distinct increase in anti-nuclear sentiment since the mid-1970s. Stanley Kubrick's "Dr Strangelove" was subtitled: "How I learned to stop worrying and to love the Bomb". A generation later, some Europeans have forgotten or have still to learn that lesson. This anti-nuclear sentiment can be traced to a number of factors, general or particular to each country. These are discussed in paras. 2-5 below and in the Annex respectively. The paper also suggests (paras. 6-7) reasons for differences in the extent of anti-nuclear sentiment, and proposes (paras. 8-20) lessons to be learned from the present situation.

II.General Factors

2. The most important general factors are: a growing perception and therefore fear of the risk of a nuclear war; an increase in anti-American feeling; and the impact of the drawn-out recession on readiness to accept

continual growth in defence spending.

3. The increased fear of nuclear war coincided with public recognition of Soviet achievement of strategic parity, (although in logic the existence of parity, and the development of sophisticated devices against unintentional use, should make the prospects of nuclear war less rather than more likely). But the more important reasons for increased anxiety were:

(i) failure to understand, or the misunderstanding of complex concepts, particularly deterrence and flexible response, and of the necessary limits on defence spending which argued for nuclear rather than conventional forces. Governments did not do enough to explain these. But the task was in any case very difficult;

(ii) US hamhandedness and apparent lack of judgement (late Carter/early Reagan), in contrast to the impression of competence of the Nixon/Kissinger team. The handling of ERW and then SALT II, whose non-ratification increased public anxieties, contrasted with the fate of SALT I;

(iii) the decline in East-West relations. Stimulated by some maladroit rhetoric from Washington, governments in the West were thought to be now more interested in confrontation than in dialogue;

(iv) lack of results from arms control, casting doubts on its efficacy as a process to remove nuclear dangers,

and on Western good faith in the negotiations. (This reaction was partly the result of unrealistic expectations of what arms control could or should achieve.) Nuclear arsenals were believed (fallaciously) to be growing without pause or cause;

(v) the 1979 decision to deploy land-based missiles in Europe. This brought home the nuclear message (as it was intended to do), but also increased fear of retaliatory/pre-emptive strikes hitting civilian centres;

(vi) the impression among non-official defence experts that NATO was moving away from a focus on crisis stability to concentration on achieving a maximum (and therefore less stable) deterrent posture; and

(vii) exploitation by the Western media and anti-nuclear propagandists of the horrors of nuclear war (largely irrelevant to the real argument, but highly influential).

4. A separate but related factor was the rise in the late 1970s of anti-Americanism in Western Europe, stimulated by comments by leaders of the latter eg Schmidt and Giscard; and by wider US-European disputes eg over economic issues and the Middle East. Lack of confidence in the US leadership was accompanied by growing fears that any nuclear conflict would be limited to Europe and would leave the super-powers untouched.

These fears thus led to the coupling argument for basing US INF on European soil being turned on its head.

Anti-US sentiment allowed the Russians to make some play with the unfounded claim that new US missiles were being forced on unwilling Europeans. National (UK and French) deterrents posed fewer of the political problems which new US missiles for Europe presented.

5. Other general factors contributing to this antagonism have been:

(a) the length of the recession. In the 1970s defence spending rose in Western Europe in real terms by 2.7% per year. But by the end of the decade the European record had started to slip; tougher questions were being asked about defence spending, as new generations of weapons (eg Trident) became available;

(b) the knock-on effect of the greater readiness of European governments to debate nuclear strategy with Washington, and the demands for increased consultations. No longer do the Americans have a relatively free hand (nor do they wish one) in proposing and implementing the nuclear policies of the Alliance;

(c) the rise of ecology, anti-civil nuclear energy and feminist movements, providing an early base for anti-nuclear weapon activity. These efforts were assisted by the streak of pacifism in some parts of

Europe. Coupled with these social trends is the problem of the "successor generation" in the West: a disproportionately large element of the "peace movement" is composed of the better educated under 35's;

(d) the Soviet Union was able to exploit public anxieties with its own propaganda, although its impact even on the peace movements should not be over-stated;

(e) the sentiment, not confined to the political left, that despite its record the Soviet Union no longer presented a real political or military threat to Western Europe.

(f) the effect on European opinion of third world attitudes, generally hostile to the East-West balance of terror and particularly opposed to the continued presence of nuclear weapons. The ability of the developing countries to project their own views into the European debate, while having no discernible impact at all in Moscow, is of course a reflection on the relative openness and receptivity of all three political systems.

III.

Differences

6. In general terms, there is a different social/political ethic in Europe as one moves South. The Northern countries tend to be more prosperous, literate, articulate and politically aware, with highly developed

social and political systems. In contrast, the Southern countries are poor and relatively undeveloped. The average Dane has the time, opportunity and inclination to reflect on nuclear issues; the average Sicilian does not. But why the specific differences in attitudes eg between France and the FRG? To a large extent these result from responses within individual countries to the general factors discussed earlier. Local circumstances are also important; these are discussed in the Annex. The present Government in Greece is a law unto itself. Largely for this reason public opinion there is subject to different influences, and does not fit neatly into a relatively simple analysis of European attitudes. (Differences in the West are mirrored to a lesser degree in the countries of Eastern Europe. There may be new opportunities in this context for developing our policy of differentiating between members of the Warsaw Pact; these go beyond the scope of the present paper.)

7. Four particular elements can be identified as reasons for the differences:

(i) political changes. In the North, between 1979 and 1982 governments of the left (UK, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway and the FRG) lost power, and subsequently adopted positions often rather different to those they had supported in government. In contrast, over this

period left-wing parties in France and Italy moved into power or at least association with the government. These political shifts gave political respectability and an organised base for anti-nuclear activity in the North to what before had been fringe groups. Recent figures estimate that of the anti-nuclear demonstrators 50% in the FRG adhered to the SPD and 50% to the Greens, 90% in Italy and Holland came from the left wing, and most of those in the UK did the same;

(ii) the contrary effects of anti-American feeling in each country. In the UK latent anti-Americanism has made the Government's policy less readily acceptable. The same feeling in France, because of different circumstances, has had nothing like the same impact. In the FRG, traditionally close ties to the US have not prevented anti-American elements having a disproportionately large influence. In Italy similar links have withstood the strain remarkably well;

(iii) the influence of the churches, with a particularly clear division between Catholic and Protestant feeling. It has been argued that Catholics tend to be more sceptical and/or fatalistic about the prospects of a nuclear conflict ever happening, and less concerned about their own eventual fate. In any case, there could be said to be a greater deference in Southern Europe -

whether based on religious learnings or levels of education - towards established authorities over complex issues, such as nuclear strategy;

(iv) the relative influence of ecology and other radical movements, especially in the FRG (the Greens). Such movements have had little support in France.

IV.

Lessons Learned

8. The key factors in European countries are not easily susceptible to external pressures. Social differences are largely ingrained. And domestic political shifts respond mainly to internal factors. To that extent, the lessons to be learned - for the handling of public opinion in Western Europe, and for relations with Washington - are more applicable to general trends, rather than specific differences.

9. The first lesson is that a strong and united Alliance, despite its domestic political problems and internal disputes in other areas, can succeed in carrying its point with the electorate. This has been done at a certain cost in the case of INF, with other foreign and defence policies having to be adjusted at times to take account of this overriding concern. But the extent of the Western political success, and Soviet failure, should not be overlooked. It will be essential to continue to

demonstrate to the Russians our determination to maintain a credible defence capability, and our solidarity in doing so. For this, the example of the admirable consultation over INF should be expanded to cover other areas of Alliance activity.

10. There is an evident need for a more educated public opinion in matters of defence. Well organised minorities in the "peace movements", despite the fallacies in their arguments and their misrepresentation of facts, have been able to exploit public ignorance (or unwillingness to learn). Lack of Government information and public debate in the 1960's and 1970's have contributed to the misperceptions and permitted mis-statements. In the words of Lord Carrington in 1981, a nuclear war that does not happen is preferable to a conventional war that does. But until the concept of extended deterrence is better understood, the arguments in favour of nuclear weapons will not carry their full weight.

11. We should trade more on the strong and widespread ~~and~~ support for membership of NATO, and for multilateral (as opposed to one-sided) disarmament. A different approach would be to adopt a more "national" attitude towards defence, which by implication would be less US-oriented or NATO-linked. France is the prime example

of where this attitude has retained public support. But France is not an INF-basing country; nor is she intergrated into the NATO military structure. It would be a cause for concern if other countries, such as the Greeks and particularly the FRG, began to move down this track. Instead, we should aim to emphasise to European public opinion that the commitment to NATO is not made out of some sense of altruism, but because we and our Allies believe that collective defence is the best way to ensure our own security.

12. This is not the time or place for a post-mortem on the INF dual-track approach. However, since the deployment element has become the focus of public opposition to nuclear weapons, three points may be relevant. In practical terms it was probably a mistake to site some of the new INF systems close to highly populated areas, and easily accessible to minority pressure groups (compare events at Comiso with those at Greenham Common). Land-based systems, on which the Germans at one time insisted, provided more hostages to fortune than other, admittedly less desirable options. The rationale for choosing Pershing 2's and GLCMs had perhaps as much to do with Pentagon politics as with strategic theory. Secondly, the negotiating strategy gave the Russians and anti-nuclear sentiment in the West

four years on which to build and a precise target at which to aim.

13. In addition, the original rationale for deployment was to strengthen the coupling link between US nuclear forces for the defence of Western Europe, and thus to enhance the credibility of the deterrent effect. But the negotiating strategy, on which the Germans in particular insisted, concentrated public attention on reductions as the prime aim. In the process, and especially with the adoption of the zero option, the coupling factor tended to be downplayed. The establishment of parity, at least in Europe, as the Western negotiating objective implicitly endorsed a Eurostrategic balance as acceptable, adding to the decoupling effect. This made it more difficult for governments to explain why a Soviet continuing monopoly in medium-range missiles was unacceptable, and to combat Soviet demands for account to be taken of British and French systems. More important, it failed to respond to the underlying European concern about the US commitment to their defence. The seminal comments in Schmidt's Alistair Buchan lecture in 1977 reflected his growing concern about the reliability of the US theatre nuclear umbrella and the imbalance in conventional forces at a time when parity in strategic forces had been achieved;

the increasing threat from the SS20 (which he did not mention) was only one element in this concern. Arguably, more emphasis on the coupling factor could have persuaded the Germans, increasingly nervous about their American defenders, to take the more relaxed view of the French and the Italians who for different reasons were less concerned about the US link.

14. But these theoretical considerations must be weighed against the immediate political arguments for a different course. The focus on the SS20 was needed for public consumption, to underline the continuing Soviet threat. The focus on reductions was needed to assuage those against deployment. And the zero option, despite its many flaws, was embraced by a German government desperate to find any arms control gesture by the US acceptable to their public opinion. Up to now, the anti-INF movement has not been able to divert Western governments from their chosen path. The argument for deployment has so far carried the day, largely because it is being conducted in terms of Alliance unity and determination, not NATO's nuclear doctrine.

15. As for relations with Washington, the first lesson is that the Europeans should do more to persuade the Americans of the merits of consistency (or Schmidt's "predictability") in their policies. The periodic bouts

of chest-thumping and radical changes of directions may satisfy domestic/emotional pressures, but they do real damage to the Alliance. However, just as domestic politics in each European country are not very susceptible to external pressure, so Washington will remain, to some degree and in some circumstances, unresponsive to the views of the Allies. But it is striking that the latter still maintain the influence they do with US leaders (Administration and Congress), at least where Alliance issues are concerned.

16. In addition, the INF saga demonstrates the same moral as the Siberian pipeline episode: that if we are to keep the Americans on track, we must inject our thinking, on presentation as well as substance, at all levels (including the Congress); that dealing with the State Department is no substitute for more widespread exchanges; and that views delivered early carry twice the weight of those that come later. These points are relevant to the 1984 Presidential campaign; a Democratic President might present us with new defence problems, albeit of a different nature.

17. Events of the past few years have also emphasised the need to maintain European confidence in US leadership and trust in US judgement. The prime contribution to this would be a demonstrated US readiness to re-engage in

a political dialogue with the Soviet Union, a readiness which could be best demonstrated in the form of a Summit (however unlikely this will be over the next year). But without a basic harmony between US and European governments the trust of European publics may increasingly be placed in national leaderships, as in the case of France. Demands for dual key arrangements are of course relevant to this point. National control provides some protection to governments against opposition based on genuine uncertainty about US intentions or straight anti-Americanism.

18. Mr Denis Healey used to say that 95 per cent of NATO's defence capability was to reassure the Europeans, and 5 per cent to deter the Russians. A prime requirement is to recreate in Western Europe that sense of reassurance about defence policy that the combination of rhetoric and misjudgement from Washington and opposition policies in Europe have disturbed. European governments will have to focus more directly on ways to improve the climate of East-West relations and to raise the nuclear threshold, which more than anything will provide the new reassurance.

19. Success in arms control will be an important element in restoring a more balanced public attitude towards nuclear weapons. On the other hand, such success

will continue to be elusive, at least until such time as the Russians are prepared to negotiate seriously in any one of the five or six areas in which they are now engaged. Arms control is caught in a vicious cricle: its promotion requires a better East-West climate; but it is one of the prime elements that should contribute to such an improvement. A further deterioration in East-West relations could not be offset by new success in arms control, which itself requires a restoration in the former dialogue between the superpowers.

20. Meanwhile, it will be important that we ^{be} seen to be making the effort, even if the results are fewer and slower than we would wish. The prime requirement is to prevent the public perception gaining ground that the arms race, once controlled by agreements with the Russians, is now running out of control. In this context, new US moves to develop military capabilities in space could have a damaging effect on European opinion. The merits of some form of arms control in this area require closer and more sympathetic examination if both strategic and political needs on the Western side are to be met.

6 December 1983

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

ANNEX

EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS: SPECIFIC FACTORS

United Kingdom

1. The latest demonstration (22 October) involved over 100,000 people; CND membership has increased in 4 years from 3,000 to 70,000. These numbers are still relatively small in relation to the size of population.

2. Particular reasons for anti-nuclear sentiment are:

(i) the Labour Party move to unilateral disarmament in 1981;

(ii) the influence of some Protestant denominations.

The Anglican and Catholic churches in England and Wales remain in favour of deterrence and multilateral disarmament;

(iii) latent anti-Americanism, stimulated by the performances of Carter and Reagan; and

(iv) isolationist tendencies (Mr Enoch Powell etc) and uncomfortable links with Europe (EEC, but not NATO).

These stem in part from a failure to recognise that a medium-size power cannot continue to have permanent interests without having permanent friends.

FRG

3. Recent demonstrations have involved a total of some

half-a-million people but no single event has produced the same numbers as similar events in 1981 or 1982.

4. Specific factors relevant to the FRG are:

(i) the trauma of National Socialism and its legacy. This continues to exercise a powerful influence on West Germans, including the young. They are determined that German territory should never again become a battle-ground and they see the international community moving towards this fate, spurred by the rhetoric in East and West and the increasing pace of the arms race;

(ii) the belated recognition that the shift to a strategy of flexible response implies a greater risk of conflict, both conventional and nuclear, on German soil, coupled with the appreciation that the geographical position of the FRG and its strategic importance will always put it in the forefront of any battle. Public opinion was deeply affected when US readiness, implicit in NATO's long-established doctrine, to contemplate a limited nuclear war (in Germany, presumably) was made more explicit;

(iii) the decline in East-West relations. This affects the Germans more than any other member of NATO, in terms of the inner-German dialogue and their extensive links with and interests in Warsaw Pact countries;

(iv) the move into opposition of the SPD and the rise of

the Greens;

(v) renascent nationalist feeling, with the traditional deference to American leadership becoming harder to sustain, under pressure of declining confidence in US judgement and the influence of German economic interests.

France

5. Opposition in France has been declining and is now scarce. On 22 October only some 30,000 people went into the Paris streets to demonstrate.

6. Factors of particular importance are:

(i) the national French deterrent, dependent on no other nation for development, manufacture, control and targetting. There is no shortage of anti-Americanism in France but, unlike the UK and the FRG, it does not spill over into the nuclear debate. In addition, France is not an INF-basing country;

(ii) the entry to power of the left wing in 1981;

(iii) the major peace movement is organised by and equated with the pro-Moscow Communist party, a declining though still significant force in French politics (which supports the national deterrent);

(iv) the small ecology movement does not carry much political weight;

(v) the tradition of Gaullist patriotism remains

strong, and although anti-American, pro-nuclear;

(vi) the Catholic Church, and the Catholic mentality remain powerful influences on French psychology, despite the anti-clerical traditions;

(vii) the French dialogue with the East has continued throughout the lean years as detente collapsed. There is consequently less fear in France or less public perception that the decline in US-Soviet relations will have a direct effect on their own fate;

(viii) France's independent defence posture allows her a greater degree of freedom to take initiatives in arms control than is given to other members of the Alliance.

(The last two such initiatives were Giscard's CDE proposal in 1978, and Mitterand's conditional espousal in 1983 of a five-nation nuclear conference.) This in turn provides public opinion with the impression of greater control over their own destiny in the East-West struggle. The actual significance of the initiatives should not however be over-estimated.

Italy

7. The latest demonstration involved an unexpectedly large total of some 300,000. But this is not representative of Italian opinion, which remains less concerned about INF deployment and about nuclear weapons more generally than its Northern partners.

8. Italian attitudes can be explained in terms of:

(i) the association of the Socialist left with the government in a number of areas including INF basing;

(ii) the reluctance of the Communist party, for electoral reasons, to exploit its full potential for opposition;

(iii) the lack of official Catholic Church support for the peace movement;

(iv) the relatively recent formation of the peace movement in its current form, dating from the decision to station Cruise missiles on Italian soil;

(v) the remoteness of the basing area from the centre, combined with local interest in jobs and construction contracts; and

(vi) the "historical cynicism" of the Italians towards the espousal of such causes as "peace", ecology, animal rights etc.

Holland

9. A hot bed of anti-nuclear sentiment, the 22 October demonstration put 400,000 people on the streets.

10. Opposition to nuclear weapons spreads across the political spectrum with considerable right-wing (CDA) opposition to INF deployment. Even if the left were not now in opposition, it is doubtful whether the political process in the Netherlands at present could produce

unequivocal and explicit support for NATO's nuclear doctrines. The churches, including the Catholic Church, continue to exercise a strong anti-nuclear influence.

Belgium

11. The latest events involved some 120,000 people.

12. Belgium is a classic case of a public uneducated in defence matters; the lack of a firm government, with the left in opposition; and widespread concern about the decline in East-West relations and the absence of a dialogue with the Soviet Union.

Denmark

13. A weak centre-right coalition government without a majority on security issues faces increasing anti-nuclear sentiment from the Social Democrats and the left.

Denmark, like Norway, has never permitted the stationing of nuclear weapons on her soil in peacetime. Although there is good public support for NATO membership, Danish public opinion, which reflects traditional Nordic attitudes of isolationism and neutralism, has never given defence spending a high priority especially in competition with social welfare requirements.

Norway

14. The Conservative Government which took office in 1981 (a Conservative/centre coalition since 1983) has maintained strong Norwegian support for NATO membership

and taken a robust line on nuclear issues. But this has been at the expense of the breakdown of the historic consensus on security issues in Norwegian politics, with the moderate opposition Labour Party now openly against the Alliance nuclear strategy and the growth of a considerable anti-nuclear movement. Soviet actions, eg in Afghanistan and submarine incidents in Northern waters have been a partial check to this. But Norwegian opinion also reacts unfavourably to American policy and the highly articulate views of the more anti-nuclear Sweden and Finland re-enforce this trend.

Greece

15. In contrast to the rest of Europe, where peace movements and anti-nuclear forces still reflect minority views, in Greece the Papandreou government "embraces" the peace movements (as he claimed recently to the Times). The Prime Minister espouses a nuclear freeze, a delay in INF deployments, and the creation of a nuclear free zone in the Balkans; he would prefer a Europe free of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact (but recognises that Greece's security needs require membership of NATO, not least because Turkey is a member). In all those respects, the Greek Government is unique in Western Europe; and anti-nuclear opinion, far from having to oppose Government policy, has a free run with Government backing.

16. Among the factors responsible for the Government's position are:

(i) widely-based anti-US sentiment, based on the belief that the US was in some measure responsible for the dictatorship of the Colonels and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. The Greeks believe the US takes the Turkish side in Greco-Turkish dispute. An anti-American stance also fits well with Papandreou's desire to present an independent, 'multi-dimensional' foreign policy (although this has not prevented the signing of an agreement for the continuation of the US bases in Greece for at least another five years);

(ii) the belief in Athens that Greek interests are not threatened from the Soviet Union but from their Eastern neighbours. To some extent, therefore, Greece is subject to the same influences as other European countries: anti-US feeling and "Southern" readiness to defer in complex issues to the Government's view. But, to a larger extent, it does not fit neatly into any analysis covering the rest of Europe.

Spain

17. There is little government backing for peace movements, which are widely perceived as Communist-inspired. However, there is strong anti-nuclear feeling, where the government is pledged not to allow the

stationing of nuclear weapons on Spanish soil. While the Socialist Government is committed to reconsider Spain's position in NATO, which is opposed by between 60-80 per cent of Spaniards, they are firmly committed to support Western defence. They have confirmed the renewal of a bases agreement with the US.



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