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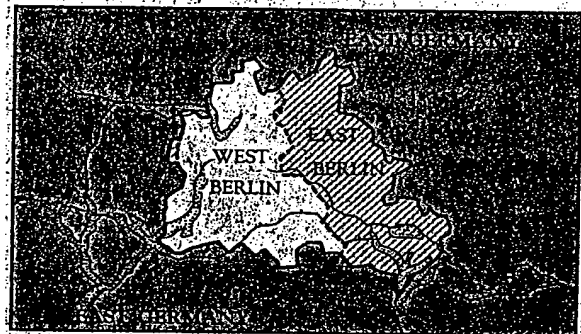
~~6 April 1959~~

0440

SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

SOVIET AND OTHER REACTIONS
TO VARIOUS COURSES OF ACTION
IN THE BERLIN CRISIS

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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Date _____

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Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 6 April 1959. Concurring were The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

6 April 1959

SUBJECT: SNIE 100-6-59: SOVIET AND OTHER REACTIONS TO
VARIOUS COURSES OF ACTION IN THE
BERLIN CRISIS

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Soviet and other reactions to four courses of action, undertaken jointly by Britain, France, and the US, in the event of failure of negotiations in the Berlin crisis and Soviet interference with Western access. The courses of action are: (a) a substantial effort to reopen ground access to West Berlin by local action; (b) a substantial effort to reopen air access; (c) reprisals against the Communists in other areas; and (d) preparations for general war.

ASSUMPTIONS^{1/}

1. The US, UK, France and the GFR --
 - a. Have reached agreement on the kind of situation regarding access to Berlin that would evoke Allied resort to force;

^{1/} These assumptions appear as given in the policy paper to which this SNIE is a contribution.

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b. Have reached agreement that resort to force would include local ground action, local air action, or reprisals, or any combination of these;

c. Have therefore accepted the risk of general war implicit in such resort to force. However, they have not reached firm agreement that they will proceed automatically to general war if resort to such limited force has resulted in initial indecisive local action.

2. Before resort to force political negotiations with the USSR at the Foreign Minister level and possibly at the Summit will have taken place and failed.

3. There has already been unacceptable interference with normal military access to or from Berlin, but German civilian traffic has not been stopped.

DISCUSSION

1. The consequences of any course of action on the international scene will always depend on the context of events within which the move is made, and on the manner, style, and timing of the action. In the present Berlin crisis there has already been extensive maneuver on both sides. The issue at stake have been defined in various ways, ranging from the

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relatively narrow question of Berlin's status to the wider problem of European and even of world security. Propaganda and diplomacy are continuously active. Neither side has finally defined its own position; each is testing as far as it may the strength and resolution of the adversary. Given the importance and dangers implicit in the whole complex of issues surrounding the Berlin problem, the mood and even the intentions of the protagonists may shift as the crisis is prolonged.

2. This being the situation, an estimate of the consequences of certain courses of action in the Berlin crisis presents peculiar difficulties. It is impossible to predict the particular context of events within which these actions might be taken, and we think it important to point out that an estimate made without knowledge of this context might be seriously misleading. A Western move made at a particular juncture of events, or executed in a particular manner, might have consequences different from the same move made under different circumstances, or in a different manner. We have therefore not tried to make a detailed estimate, but instead have attempted to describe, in a general way, some of the limits within which we believe the consequences of Western action would be likely to fall, and to explain some of the factors which would be likely to determine these consequences.

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3. In particular, Soviet and free world reactions to the Western measures listed above would be influenced by the manner in which negotiations had failed as well as by the positions on both sides which had led to this outcome. Much would depend upon whether the Soviet or Western side seemed to be responsible for the failure. If the whole chain of negotiations had been run through, and the breakdown occurred at the summit, international tension would be markedly greater than if it came at the ministerial level or lower. Incidents arising from harassment or interference with Allied traffic by Soviet or GDR authorities might have heightened tensions and influenced world opinion for or against one side or the other. Similar effects would result if either side had stepped up military preparations. Also, the skill with which the Western measures were justified to the world would influence both Soviet behavior and free world opinion.

4. Thus it is clear that the whole array of circumstances prevailing when the courses of action under discussion are put into play cannot be known in advance. However, in order to narrow the range of uncertainty the following general factors, applying to all four cases, are assumed to be operative:

(a) At the time when negotiations breakdown, the Western Powers will have made statements indicating that

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they intend to maintain their rights of access to Berlin by force if necessary. Their public posture will be such that resort to force will be clearly implicit as a next step. Some preparations manifesting readiness for military action will have been undertaken. These will include, on a progressive basis, use of emergency powers and appropriate degree of mobilization, unit deployments, increased emphasis on readiness of units, and establishment of an increased alert posture.

(b) The Soviets and GDR will not explicitly deny Allied access to Berlin. Instead, they will simply be making access subject to certain conditions, beginning presumably with replacement of Soviet by GDR controllers at checkpoints. Thus, the Western justification for resort to force will have to rest on the West's own determination that one or another requirement governing access constitutes interference which is in effect a denial of access.^{2/}

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It is emphasized that these are assumptions and in no way an estimate that the four powers, especially the UK, will or will not agree that these circumstances alone justify the following courses of action.

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(Reactions in the West in particular will greatly depend on how far it is clear to public opinion and governments that something more than a mere technical issue is at stake.)

COURSE A: A substantial effort to reopen ground access by local action -- defined as the dispatch of a reinforced battalion, with forces up to a reinforced division with tactical air support in readiness if required. The force will proceed toward the opposite end of the autobahn. If military conflict should take place the force will take over control points as required and overcome such resistance as feasible. If physical barriers or armed resistance are encountered beyond its power to deal with, the force will disengage and await orders of higher authority.

5. The USSR's response to this course of action would depend primarily upon its estimate of the risks involved. It would be clear to the Soviet leaders that the Western allies were prepared to run substantial risks of general war; beyond this, it is possible that the Soviets would believe the West determined to press its action all the way to general war if necessary. If the Soviets did make the latter estimate, they might seize the initiative by an early nuclear attack on the West, but it is more likely that they would signify a willingness to make sufficient concessions to put the issue quickly

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back into the diplomatic arena. They would probably hope that in the general relief following their move they would gain some credit for devotion to peace, and might not fare badly in the negotiations.

6. We believe, however, that the Soviets would not be convinced by the postulated course of action, even with the accompanying preparations noted in Paragraph 5 above, that the Western Powers had decided to go as far as general war. Accordingly we believe that the most probable Soviet response would be to use armed force -- Soviet or East German or both -- to expel the Western troops from GDR territory. They would recognize that great risks were involved in such action, and they might initially attempt various obstructive measures which would hinder the progress of the allied force without involving armed conflict, while they tested the possibility of a world reaction favorable to their interests. But they would feel that if the Western resort to force succeeded the general power position of the USSR would be greatly diminished, and that this in turn would undermine Soviet influence everywhere. They would particularly fear the possible threat to their position in Eastern Europe. Moreover, they would calculate that, because of the superiority of Soviet forces in the immediate area, the Western Powers would in the end prefer to seek a negotiated settlement rather than to increase the scale of

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their local military effort. The Soviets would still attempt to keep the engagement localized, while continuing to warn of the great danger of expansion of hostilities and to call urgently for renewed negotiations.^{3/}

7. In responding with force Moscow might limit itself to use of East German troops. This would have the advantage of avoiding a direct confrontation between Soviet and Western forces, and it would lend plausibility to the claim of the GDR to sovereignty and independence. On the other hand, there would be definite risks in the use of East German forces. The political reliability of some of these troops may be regarded by the Soviets as uncertain and they might fear the possibility of defection among them. If the East Germans suffered a defeat or a large-scale defection, there might be flash risings in the GDR and the possibility of these spreading to Poland or Hungary, or both. We believe that the Soviets might initially

^{3/} The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, dissents from Paragraph 6. He believes that the postulated course of action would convince the Soviets that the Western allies were prepared if necessary to proceed to general war, and that the Soviets would therefore find ways to ease the crisis. Moreover, he believes that the Soviets would estimate that any overt engagement of US and USSR armed forces could not be localized, but rather would lead to general war.

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use East German forces for setting up road blocks and other obstructive action, but once fighting had broken out they would feel obliged to use their own forces along with East Germans.

Other Reactions

8. Western resort to armed force would meet with considerable public disapproval in the non-Communist world generally, though in varying degrees in different countries depending on the importance attached to the issues involved. Unfavorable reactions would stem primarily from fear of war. In the more important countries of NATO, public reaction would probably be mixed, and would depend to some degree on how far Soviet obstructive actions appeared designed merely to enforce technical requirements for GDR supervision of Western access to Berlin, rather than to isolate Berlin from the West and communize the city. If the latter seemed clearly to be the Soviet objective, there would be considerable public support for the Western countermove. But events would probably move so rapidly that there would be little time for public opinion to crystallize and to affect the action of governments. In the

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end, it would be the success or failure of the operation which would largely determine public attitudes.

9. We believe that the NATO governments together with others would support the move of the three powers. Many governments, however, and especially those of neutralist countries, would oppose. The matter would almost certainly be raised in the UN. Once in the UN General Assembly (assuming that the Security Council could not act), it is unlikely that either the Soviets or the West could command a two-thirds majority for a resolution fully endorsing its own position. There would be strong pressure for a compromise resolution, which, though it might be presented as not prejudicing the position of either side, might nevertheless tend to freeze the status quo to the advantage of the Soviets.

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Course B: A substantial effort to reopen air access -- Western action would be graduated depending upon the degree of Soviet and GDR interference. If there was interference which endangered the safety of Western aircraft peaceably transiting the corridors, Western combat aircraft would come to their assistance.

Soviet Reactions

10. We believe that, if the Western Powers ignored Soviet GDR requirements for control of air access by continuing their flights to Berlin, the Soviets would probably employ means of interference short of actual firing upon Western aircraft. If they employed means of harassment -- still short of actual firing upon Western aircraft -- against which the Western Powers felt obliged to employ combat aircraft, we do not believe the Soviets would even then actually fire upon the Western planes, although the likelihood of their doing so would increase. Such action would cause them to appear before the world as the initiator of hostilities. A more compelling reason for Soviet restraint would be that a denial of ground access would almost certainly be in effect; the Soviets would probably think they had a better case on that aspect, and

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could also more easily force the West to take the onus of actually opening fire. We believe that Bloc aircraft would engage in combat only if they were fired upon by Western aircraft, or if Western aircraft left the corridors. More likely, therefore, the Soviets would point to the great dangers in the situation and call urgently for reopening of negotiations. If further negotiations did not result or failed to resolve the situation and if a long-continued garrison airlift developed, the USSR would find itself faced with increased world tension and a continuing handicap to its "peaceful coexistence" policy without concrete gains. In this circumstance, the USSR might take more drastic action against the airlift, but would be more likely to seek some peaceful alternative method of ending the Berlin tensions, as in the case of the 1948-49 airlift, even at the cost of non-vital concessions. ^{4/}

4/ The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, and the Director of Special Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense, do not agree with the estimated Soviet reaction to this course of action as presented in this paragraph. They believe that the present text does not fully recognize: (1) the technical and practical infeasibility of high performance Western combat aircraft remaining within the corridors while engaged in the tactical operations contemplated in this course of action; (2) the repeated historical precedents of Soviet armed attack against any Western aircraft violating Communist air space; or (3) the probable ineffectiveness of the use of Western combat aircraft to drive off harassing Soviet aircraft without firing. /In

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In their view, analysis of these considerations alone leads to the conclusion that, in the circumstances envisaged, the most probable Soviet response to this Western course of action would sooner or later be the use of armed force to deny air access to Berlin; that is, essentially the same response and based on the same reasoning contemplated with respect to a Western effort to reopen land access (paragraphs 5-6).

Therefore, they believe that Paragraph 10 should read as follows:

"We believe that if the Western Powers ignored the Soviet and GDR requirements for control of air access, but a military effort to reopen land access had not taken place, the Soviets would probably react initially with means of interference short of actual firing upon Western aircraft. If they employed means of harassment against which the Western Powers felt obliged to employ combat aircraft, we believe the Soviets would probably respond with the force deemed sufficient to destroy or drive out the Western aircraft. Such action would be presented to the world as a defensive act against armed aggression by the West. While the Soviets would appreciate that the actual shooting down of Western planes might spark wider conflict leading perhaps to general war, we believe their reasoning in this instance would be the same as with respect to an attempt by a Western land force to reopen land access as indicated in paragraphs 5 and 6

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above. If the Western effort to reopen air access followed a frustrated attempt to reopen land access or coincided with such an attempt, then the initial Soviet response to the appearance of undocumented Western transport aircraft over the GDR would almost certainly be armed attack."

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11. One course open to the Soviets would be to impose a blockade on civil access to West Berlin in the belief that the West could not supply the city by air against forms of interference such as ECM. We believe this course of action is unlikely because the Soviets would wish for political reasons not to imply that their aim was seizure of West Berlin. This would unite Western opinion and probably close off acceptance of some form of "free city" arrangement, a negotiating position which the Soviets would probably wish to keep open.

Other Reactions

12. The extent to which the protection of Western air traffic would be condemned or approved by free world opinion would depend in large part on what provocation the USSR had given. If the Soviets used physical interference or threatened to shoot down Western transport planes to enforce closing, the Western measures would probably be approved. If Western combat aircraft went into the corridors after transports had actually been fired upon or shot down, the Western action would probably seem clearly justified for the great bulk of Western opinion. Also, far wider approval would be found for the Western actions if the Communists were simultaneously attempting to deny ground access.

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COURSE C: Reprisals against the Communists in the form of tripartite naval controls on USSR and GDR merchant shipping --

Reprisals would be applied progressively in accordance with the degree of interference applied by the USSR and GDR to Western access to Berlin. Delays would be imposed for inspection of documents, cargo and health conditions, or search for illegally carried personnel. Passage would be denied where certain cargos were carried or certain destinations declared. Finally, there would be full control on the high seas, return of Soviet and GDR shipping to ports of departure, and detention of ships attempting to evade the blockade. Execution of these measures would be by US, British, and French naval forces.

Soviet Reactions

13. Since the Western program of reprisals would be applied gradually, the USSR would not be forced to determine at once whether it should make concessions on the Berlin issue. The USSR would probably react initially with warnings that it would not tolerate such derogation of its prestige as a great power. It would also await world reactions to see whether opposition to the Western measures developed in key countries on a sufficient scale

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to permit effective diplomatic and propaganda action against the Western Powers, perhaps in the UN. As the Western reprisals mounted in scale and seriousness, the Soviets would probably retaliate in kind against the shipping of the the three powers in Bloc ports and national waters, enlisting the collaboration of other states if they could. They would probably attempt to detain or take custody of Western merchant shipping on the high seas near to their own coasts and ports; declare certain waters, such as the Black and Baltic seas, closed to ships of the three powers; use armed escorts for their shipping where feasible and even use their large submarine force to harass, detain, and threaten Western shipping. They would probably not shrink from armed encounters at sea in protecting their merchant shipping.

14. Throughout these actions and counteractions the Soviet leaders would weigh carefully both the risks of an expansion of hostilities and the possibilities for political exploitation of the situation against the Western Powers. The effect on the Soviet economy would be little. Moscow could circumvent such reprisals by recourse to ships of other flags and by overland shipments if it felt obliged to do so. The political penalties imposed on the

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Soviet Union, if any, would be minor. If this course of action led to discord among the Western Powers, Moscow would even see certain advantages resulting from it. Thus, we do not think that the postulated allied course of action would have a significant effect on the Soviet position in the Berlin crisis.

Other Reactions

15. As with reactions in free world countries to the other courses of action, much would depend on the nature of the Soviet action in blocking access to Berlin. Thus, while there would be a tendency to view the measures as exclusively retaliatory and perhaps as making settlement of the Berlin problem even more difficult, they would probably win far wider support if they came at a time when West Berlin was under full blockade. Initially, since there would be less danger of immediate hostilities than would be involved in the other courses of action, there would probably be less opposition stemming from fear of war. Reactions would probably be increasingly unfavorable, however, as reprisals mounted the scale toward armed action. Even before this, some countries with important shipping interests would object on the ground that the reprisals compromised the principle of freedom of the seas. Should these measures prove ineffective in changing the Soviet attitude on Berlin there would probably be widespread recriminations against the three powers in free world countries.

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COURSE D: Preparations for general war -- In addition to the measures outlined in paragraph 4 (a) above, and to any other military preparations which may be required to bring the US to full military and civilian defense readiness for general war, Congressional leaders would be alerted to the probable necessity of war, Congressional authorization would be obtained for the use of force as necessary to redress our grievances, NATO would be informed and action sought for the initial stages of NATO formal alert, and consultations held as provided in the Rio, SEATO, and ANZUS treaties, and with the Baghdad Pact members.

Soviet Reactions

16. We believe that US preparations for general war of the scope and nature postulated -- the Allies not having been heard from -- would probably convince the Soviet leaders that the US, at least, had decided actually to proceed if necessary to that extreme. If the principal NATO allies of the US appeared to be in agreement, the Soviets would almost certainly be convinced that general war was imminent, and we think that they would signify their willingness to reach a negotiated settlement which respected basic Western interests. It should be observed, however, that the

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danger of a miscalculation in the situation would be great. If the NATO allies clearly were not with the US in the decision for general war we still believe that the Soviets would probably back down sufficiently to assure the reopening of negotiations; in this case, however, they would probably expect that the divided policies of the Western alliance would assure a relatively favorable diplomatic outcome for themselves.

Other Reactions

17. There would probably be widespread alarm among the people of the Atlantic community and profound disapproval in much of the rest of the world. There would be demands in the UN for action to halt the trend toward war. Yet these would not necessarily be the permanent or decisive reactions. To the extent to which NATO countries recognized that the issue posed over Berlin really involved the defense of the free world, we believe that these countries would accept the measures. This would be especially true if it were widely believed that the military preparations held good promise of maintaining the essential Western position without actual resort to war. We cannot judge at this

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time whether such reactions would be likely to outweigh those of fear and opposition.^{5/}

Soviet Reaction to an Ultimatum

18. If military preparations and declarations of intent to go to general war had not produced a shift in the Soviet position, and the Western Powers then issued an ultimatum demanding a redress of grievances, say within 24 hours, it seems to us impossible to predict the Soviet response with any assurance. We believe that, at this stage in the proceedings, the Soviet leaders would not doubt the firmness of the Western ultimatum, nor would there be much time for them to explore alternative courses of action. It must be presumed that, if they had allowed the crisis to proceed so far as to call for an ultimatum,

^{5/} The Acting Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, believes that this paragraph makes insufficiently clear the attitude to be expected of NATO governments under the assumed circumstances that they have not previously agreed to Course D and that they are acting on the developments represented in Paragraph 4 (b) above. The Acting Director believes that most of the NATO governments would probably oppose and not join the US in Course D under the given circumstances. They would join in this course of action, however, should the USSR, as is unlikely, reverse its tactics and openly threaten to expel the Allies from Berlin by force or blockade, and especially if Courses A or B had already been undertaken.

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they would be prepared to accept the gravest risk of general war. Confronted with a clear-cut and uncompromising challenge the USSR would consider its prestige as a great power at stake, and would surely find it difficult to back down. Accordingly, the Soviet leaders might launch an armed attack on the West immediately.

19. On the other hand, the issuance of the ultimatum would itself have deprived both sides of most of the advantages of surprise. The Soviets would be in the worst position to launch a true pre-emptive attack on Western forces when those forces were fully poised for their own missions. This consideration alone almost certainly would be sufficient to persuade the Soviets that a general attack on the West was an unacceptable risk, provided that they had not come to estimate at the time that the West was irrevocably committed to an attack on the USSR. The possibility cannot be discounted that they might decide to launch a surprise attack after an interval during which the crisis had subsided, Western forces were in a routine state of alert and negotiations had been reopened. The probability, however, is that the Soviet leaders would not deliberately initiate general war since they would still estimate that the scale

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of damage they would suffer in such a war would threaten the survival of their regime and society. It is much more likely that the Soviets would make the minimum concessions deemed necessary, meanwhile temporizing and exploiting the Western action in propaganda throughout the world while seeking new approaches and means of pressure to create new political initiatives in Europe or elsewhere.

REACTIONS WITHIN GERMANY TO THE FOUR COURSES OF ACTION

20. The reactions in Germany to the four courses of action would not differ substantially from those in the other Western European countries. In West Germany generally there would be considerable support for Courses A, B, or C, but the fear of general war is such that Course D would almost certainly arouse some reactions of panic. Courses A, B, and C would be strongly supported in West Berlin and even Course D would be somewhat more likely to get general assent there than elsewhere in Europe. In the circumstances envisaged the sense of danger would already be extreme and the Berliners would probably prefer to run the further risks involved rather than to submit to Soviet demands. In East

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Germany, there would be some likelihood, especially in connection with Courses A and D, that a popular rising would be triggered, but we think it more likely that the population would not expose itself to retaliation so long as the outcome was uncertain. There might be greater likelihood of spontaneous anti-regime manifestations if the Communists seemed to back down before the Western threat.

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