

The Durable Doctrine

Friday, Sep. 21, 1962

THE PRESIDENCY (See Cover) The hour—6 p.m.—was unusual for a presidential press conference. So was the occasion. So was the tingling of high excitement that filled the room. The U.S., fretful and frustrated about the buildup of Russian arms and military personnel in Cuba, anxiously waited to hear what President Kennedy would say about his Cuba policy.

Politicians and private citizens had been barraging Kennedy with demands that he "do something." Moscow, having the time of its life, had issued a statement warning Kennedy that he had better do nothing if he wanted to stay out of trouble. The U.S., said the Russians, "cannot now attack Cuba and expect that the aggressor will be free from punishment for this attack. If such attack is made, this will be the beginning of unleashing war." Kennedy was calm. He came with a prepared statement, which he read with force. But its well-formed sentences did not shift the debate or alter any previous views; they did not change the policy of "containment" and watchful waiting which the President has espoused to date.

"Whatever Must Be Done." Castro, said the President, is "in trouble. Along with his pledges for political freedom, his industries are stagnating, his harvests are declining, his own followers are beginning to see that their revolution has been betrayed." As for those shipments of Communist weapons, they "do not constitute a serious threat to any other part of this hemisphere." Accordingly, "unilateral military intervention on the part of the U.S. cannot currently be either required or justified.

"But let me make this clear once again," Kennedy went on. "If at any time the Communist buildup in Cuba were to endanger or interfere with our security in any way ... or if Cuba should ever attempt to export its aggressive purposes by force or the threat of force against any nation in this hemisphere, or become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies." But doing "whatever must be done" is not a policy; it is a taken-for-granted imperative for any Administration in any crisis. Kennedy's statement failed to still voices that had been raised against his inaction in the Cuba crisis. And in the absence of a more positive policy, there was increasing talk about a solid rock upon which current U.S. action against Cuba might be based.

That rock is the Monroe Doctrine. Nikita Khrushchev considers the Monroe Doctrine a corpse. Said he in 1960: "Now the remains of this doctrine should best be buried, as every dead body is, so that it does not poison the air by its decay." Some Americans, even including some officials of the U.S. Government, look upon it as, if not quite dead, then at least moribund. It is "out of date," says Eleanor Roosevelt.

But others think differently. Last week New York's Republican Senator Kenneth Keating declared on the Senate floor that "the Monroe Doctrine, cornerstone of American foreign policy, has been violated." In a letter to the President, Texas' Democratic Congressman O. C. Fisher called for a naval blockade of Cuba and invocation of the Monroe Doctrine, "since the Soviets have now openly and brazenly violated the very essence of that policy." Connecticut's Democratic Senator Thomas J. Dodd said the U.S. "should invoke the Monroe Doctrine to proclaim a total embargo" on Communist military shipments to Cuba. Old Latin America Hand Spruille Braden, onetime Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, called for a U.S. military invasion of Cuba in the name of the Monroe Doctrine.

Prodding the President. Harry Truman, in his own way, was all for Monroe. "The reason we're in trouble in Cuba," he said, "is that Ike didn't have the guts to enforce the Monroe Doctrine." In less rough language, other politicians of both parties indicated that they felt the same way about Kennedy. South Carolina's Senator Strom Thurmond said the President's comments on Cuba "indicate strongly that the Monroe Doctrine has recently been reinterpreted with major omissions." In the Senate debate on the Administration request for stand-by authority to call up 150,000 reservists, Republicans urged amendments to prod the President into taking action against Castro. Connecticut's Prescott Bush offered an amendment declaring that the U.S. "has the right and obligation" to end Communist domination of Cuba. His amendment, said Bush, would put Russia on notice "that the Monroe Doctrine is not dead, but remains an integral part of American foreign policy and will be enforced" Iowa's Jack Miller proposed an amendment that would have "authorized and directed" the President "to take such action as is necessary to prevent any violation of the Monroe Doctrine." Most of these comments were emotional. Many were unknowing. But in a significant sense they reflected an intense American conviction that the Monroe Doctrine — almost like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution — is an enduring cornerstone of national policy.

Avalanches of Change. And so it is. In the flux of history, the most earnest pronouncements of statesmen tend to be ephemeral. The archives of nations are stuffed with decrees, declarations, edicts, enunciations, protocols and pronouncements that were meant to resound for decades but lasted only for weeks or months. Yet the Monroe Doctrine lives on in the hearts and minds of Americans—even though most of them have only the foggiest notion of what it says and means.

When James Monroe issued his doctrine on Dec. 2, 1823, most of the world's great nations were ruled by kings or emperors, and most of their subjects were farmers or peasants. Byron and Beethoven were still living, Darwin and Marx were still children. The years since then have witnessed avalanches of change that have transformed the world beyond the imaginings of the men of Monroe's time. But the Monroe Doctrine survived all the transformations and remains today a living principle of national policy.

A Cautious Man. The doctrine's durability derived in part from the character of its author. John Calhoun, who as Monroe's Secretary of War sat in on the Cabinet discussions that shaped the Monroe Doctrine, recalled his former chief as "among the wisest and most cautious men I have ever known." Calhoun meant the word cautious in a complimentary sense. Thomas Jefferson, Monroe's political mentor, wrote that he was "a man whose soul might be turned wrong side outwards without discovering a blemish to the world." In keeping with the patient, prudent

makeup of its author, the Monroe Doctrine was no slapdash improvisation. It was hammered out slowly, over many hours of thought and discussion. When it was finally presented to the world, it had the qualities of Monroe himself: plain and solid and durable as a slab of bronze.

Born into the Virginia aristocracy that produced four of the U.S.'s first five Presidents, Monroe had an affinity for history in the making, and he lived his life in the thick of it. As a teenage officer in the Revolutionary Army, he was severely wounded in a heroic charge at the Battle of Trenton. He became a captain at 19, a lieutenant colonel at 21, drew from Washington a commendation as a "brave, active and sensible officer." It was characteristic of Monroe, with his gift for being in the right place at the historic moment, that at 22 he was present at the grand victory ball in Fredericksburg, Va., after Cornwallis' surrender, mingling with George Washington, Mad Anthony Wayne, Light Horse Harry Lee, Baron von Steuben, Count de Grasse and other great captains of the Revolution.

When the Congress of the Confederation met in Annapolis, Md., two years later to consider ratification of the peace treaty with Britain, young Monroe was there as a member of the Virginia delegation, along with his former law teacher Thomas Jefferson. A member of Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party, Monroe served three terms in the Congress of the Confederation, was elected to the Senate at 32.

As Minister to France in the 1790s, Monroe suffered his first and greatest setback: his pro-French views tangled with the Administration's policy of neutrality between France and Britain, and President Washington angrily ordered him recalled. Washington wanted an envoy who would "promote, not thwart, the neutral policy of the Government." Monroe returned to the U.S. in disgrace, and it looked as if his public career might be finished, but he was liked and admired in his home state, and within a few years after his recall he bounced back as Governor of Virginia.* In 1803 Monroe's old friend Jefferson sent him to France as a special envoy to help negotiate the U.S. right to navigation on the Mississippi, a cause dear to Monroe's heart. Once again in the thick of history, he arrived in Paris just in time to take part in the negotiation of the Louisiana Purchase.

"Era of Good Feeling." In what came to be called the "Virginia Dynasty," Madison succeeded Jefferson and Monroe succeeded Madison almost as a matter of course. Madison served as Jefferson's Secretary of State and Monroe as Madison's. Amid the military disasters of 1814, when the British briefly occupied Washington and set fire to the executive mansion, Secretary of State Monroe took over the War Department from bumbling John Armstrong, and achieved the rare distinction of holding two top Cabinet posts at once. In 1816 he was elected President with the inevitability of a crown prince succeeding to the throne in a stable monarchy.

Monroe was a fervent believer in national unity. Shortly after his inauguration he set off on a national tour — a strenuous undertaking in those days — using his enormous personal popularity to help bind the nation together. The trip was a splendid success, even in New England, the old stronghold of Federalism. Cheered the New Haven Herald, describing the city's reaction to Monroe's visit: "The demon of party for a time departed, and gave place for a general burst of National Feeling." The Boston Centinel reported that the President's visit served to "harmonize feelings, annihilate dissensions, and make us one people." The paper applied the label "Era of

Good Feeling" to the new Administration, and the label has stuck down through the generations. Monroe was re-elected President in 1820 by an electoral count of 231 to 1* And it was in his second term that he promulgated his durable doctrine.

What It Said. From his days as Secretary of State, Monroe had taken a keen and solicitous interest in the Latin American colonies that revolted against Spanish rule; in 1822 the U.S. became the first power to recognize any of Latin America's new nations. In that same year, two potential menaces to the New World loomed up in the Old.

Alexander I, Czar of Russia, issued a *ukase* claiming the entire Pacific Coast of North America and the surrounding seas down to the 51st parallel (the northern tip of Vancouver Island). Monroe directed his Secretary of State—a prickly genius named John Quincy Adams—to draft a protest. Foreshadowing a major segment of the Monroe Doctrine, Adams informed the Russian minister in Washington "that we should contest the right of Russia to any territorial establishment on this continent, and that we should assume distinctly the principle that the American continents are no longer subjects for any new European colonial establishments." To the U.S. Minister in Russia, Adams wrote: "There can, perhaps, be no better time for saying, frankly and explicitly, to the Russian government, that the future peace of the world, and the interest of Russia herself, cannot be promoted by Russian settlements upon any part of the American continent."

The second threat loomed up at the congress of European powers at Verona, Italy, in the autumn of 1822. In Spain a revolution had forced the tyrannical Ferdinand VII (Ferdinand the Unbeloved) to accept a liberal constitution. Bent on preserving absolutism, France and the Holy Alliance powers—Russia, Austria and Prussia—decided at Verona to intervene in Spain to crush the revolution. Early the following year, a French army marched across the Pyrenees and swiftly routed the revolutionary forces. The French invasion of Spain stirred uneasiness in Washington. It seemed possible that the Verona powers, having restored Ferdinand the Unbeloved to full power, might now turn to the New World and Spain's former colonies.

"Perfectly Moonstruck." While President Monroe was pondering this prospect, Britain's Foreign Minister George Canning proposed a joint declaration by the U.S. and British governments warning the European powers against any attempt to re-conquer Spanish America. Canning was no friend of republican revolutions, but he valued the profitable trade between Britain and the new nations of Latin America. The U.S. Minister in London laid down a condition: Britain would first have to recognize the independence of the former Spanish colonies. Canning bluntly balked.

That autumn, with the U.S.-British negotiations stalled on the recognition issue, the news reached Washington that the French had taken Cadiz, the last stronghold of the Spanish revolutionists. In his diary, Secretary Adams recorded that Monroe was "alarmed," and that Secretary of War Calhoun was "perfectly moonstruck" with dismay.

Monroe decided that the time had come for the U.S., on its own, to warn the Old World to let the New World alone. Adams thoroughly approved of the idea of a unilateral declaration. "It would

be more candid as well as more dignified," he said, "to avow our principles explicitly to Russia and France than to come in as a cockboat in the wake of the British man-of-war."

For All the World to Heed. Adams wanted to communicate the U.S. declaration to France and Russia through the normal channels of diplomacy, but Monroe decided to incorporate it into his year-end message to Congress on the state of the Union. In doing so, he made his doctrine an openly announced national policy—for all the world to heed.

The text of the Monroe Doctrine consists of two distinct parts that were separated in Monroe's message by several paragraphs dealing with other matters.

The first part, basically the work of Secretary Adams, mentioned the Russian claims on the Pacific Coast, and then declared: "The occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers."

The second part, the heart of the doctrine and largely from Monroe's own mind and pen, dealt with the threat of European intervention in Latin America. The "political system of the allied powers" is "essentially different" from that of America, said Monroe, and the U.S. is devoted to the defense of its own system. "We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety . . . It is impossible that the allied powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness; nor can anyone believe that our southern brethren, if left to themselves, would adopt it of their own accord. It is equally impossible, therefore, that we should behold such interposition in any form with indifference."

The Best Bit of Paper. The old Marquis de Lafayette, friend of freedom and hero of the American Revolution, hailed the Monroe declaration as "the best little bit of paper that God had ever permitted any man to give to the world." But most European reaction was hostile. Prince Metternich, Chancellor of Austria and guiding spirit of the Holy Alliance, called the declaration "a new act of revolt, more unprovoked, fully as audacious, no less dangerous than the former" (meaning the Revolution of 1776). Czar Alexander I said that Monroe's message "enunciates views and pretensions so exaggerated, establishes principles so contrary to the rights of the European powers, that it merits only the most profound contempt." Even Canning, with a remote claim to being an instigator of the Monroe Doctrine, was bitterly displeased about the doctrine's barrier to British colonization in the Americas.

What especially galled the leaders of Europe's great powers was the audacity of the Monroe Doctrine, unbacked by any commensurate military power. In 1823, in its usual state of between-wars unpreparedness, the U.S. had virtually no standing Army and only a picayune Navy, consisting of five sloops of war.

The European powers, even those that became allies of the U.S., never accorded the Doctrine recognition. To this day it has no standing as a principle of international law. It remains a unilateral declaration, binding upon U.S. Presidents only as a traditional policy, and binding upon the rest of the world only to the extent that the world respects the U.S.'s power and determination to enforce it.

After Appomattox. Despite all the obvious obstacles—European hostility, U.S. unpreparedness, lack of legal force—the Monroe Doctrine, judged by the pragmatic verdict of history, has been an enormously successful policy. Since Monroe enunciated it, not a single Latin American state has lost its independence as a result of outright aggression from outside the hemisphere. In only two instances—aside from Castro's Cuba—did New World nations fall under European rule, even temporarily. Significantly, both exceptions occurred while the U.S. was preoccupied with its own Civil War. In 1861, at the invitation of the Dominican President, Spain declared that its former colony of Santo Domingo was once again under Spanish rule; and in 1863, with the help of Mexican royalists, France set up an Austrian prince as Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico. These adventures came to an end soon after Appomattox. The Spaniards got out of Santo Domingo in 1865. At the insistent prodding of U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward, France started withdrawing its troops from Mexico in 1866 and a year later Maximilian died before a Mexican firing squad. The Monroe Doctrine guarded not only the independence of the Latin American states, but their territorial integrity too.

The violent march of European imperialism virtually bypassed Latin America. In the 1830s, Britain annexed the barren Falkland Islands, now claimed by Argentina, and added to its Central American colony of British Honduras some lands now claimed by Guatemala, but in both cases the territory taken was virtually uninhabited, and no Latin American state was exercising effective sovereignty.

The Deterrent Effect. The success of the doctrine was largely in its deterrent effect: its very existence tended to stop trouble before it happened. Not until the Spanish-American War (in which the Monroe Doctrine played only a negligible part) did Europeans really look upon the U.S. as a great power; but the U.S. was nevertheless formidable enough that nations with appetites for New World territory—Britain, France, Spain and later Germany—were wary of getting involved in a fight. Time and again, during the latter part of the 19th century, German admirals urged their government to take over sites for naval bases in the Caribbean; every time, cooler heads insisted that the inevitable clash with the U.S. was too high a price to pay. In short, the Monroe Doctrine, as European leaders liked to say, was presumptuous. But it worked.

Drastic Intervention. Monroe's successors not only upheld his doctrine—they extended it beyond the scope he originally gave to it. In 1845 James K. Polk declared, as the "settled policy" of the U.S., that "no future European colony or dominion shall with our consent be planted or established upon any part of the North American continent." Far broader was the Theodore Roosevelt extension of the Monroe Doctrine. Down through the 19th century, it was official U.S. policy that the Monroe Doctrine did not bar outside nations from using armed force against Latin American states to punish wrongs or to collect debts, as long as the attackers refrained from annexing territory or changing the form of government. But when Germany undertook a

blockade of Venezuelan ports in 1902 to force the current dictator to pay claims due to German citizens, U.S. public opinion got so aroused that the Germans called off the blockade.

In 1904 Roosevelt sent two warships to Santo Domingo to dramatize the U.S. interest in settling a tense debt dispute between the island and France. Then TR enunciated what came to be called the Roosevelt Corollary, declaring that if a Latin American country defaults on debts or otherwise misbehaves, the U.S. is justified in intervening, "however reluctantly," in order to forestall European intervention.

Under the Roosevelt Corollary, the U.S. intervened drastically in the internal affairs of several insolvent Caribbean republics. Three countries were actually occupied and ruled by the U.S. Marines for long stretches of time: the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924, Haiti from 1915 to 1934, and Nicaragua almost continually from 1912 to 1933.

"Yankee Imperialism." The Roosevelt Corollary doubtless prevented European interventions in the Caribbean. But it also did grave damage in U.S. relations with Latin America. Denunciations of "Yankee imperialism" became oratorical routine for every aspiring Latin American politician. Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy undertook to undo that damage.

FDR recalled the Marines from Nicaragua and Haiti, toured Latin America, sipped toasts with Latin America's chiefs of state (many of them dictators who had seized office through military coups), preached the new doctrine of Pan-American amity. At the Pan-American Conference in Montevideo in 1933, the U.S. agreed to a resolution prohibiting the nations of the hemisphere from interfering in each other's "internal or external concerns." In later years, the Latins drafted and the U.S. accepted even broader bans on intervention. The current version of the ban, adopted in 1948, declares: "No state or group of states has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatsoever, in the internal or external affairs of another state." Despite all these U.S. efforts to placate its southern neighbors, and despite all the economic aid the U.S. has given to Latin American nations, there is still a residue of anti-U.S. feeling. It shrinks year by year, but it remains strong enough that in many Latin American countries politicians have to be wary of openly taking pro-U.S. stands.

Policy of Nonaction. The Montevideo conference's ban on intervention in effect repealed the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. And in the eyes of many Latin Americans—and some U.S. statesmen and scholars—the Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, signed by the U.S. and the Latin American states at Rio in 1947, practically repealed the Monroe Doctrine. Under that treaty, "an armed attack by any State against an American State shall be considered as an attack against all the American States." The argument is that the basic purpose of the Doctrine—safeguarding the independence and territorial integrity of New World nations against aggression from outside the hemisphere—has been taken over by the multilateral Rio Pact, rendering the unilateral Doctrine obsolete.

Not so. As a declaration of national policy, the Monroe Doctrine rested upon the U.S.'s right of self-defense. The U.S., as a sovereign nation, retains that right, and it is explicitly recognized in the Rio Pact. U.S. policymakers have made it unmistakably clear that the U.S. has not surrendered that right. The late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles declared that "no member

of the Rio Pact gives up what the Charter of the United Nations calls the inherent right of self-defense; that right is reserved." President Eisenhower made the same point in relation to the Organization of American States: "I think that the Monroe Doctrine has by no means been supplanted." The U.S.'s commitment to the OAS, he said, did not prevent the U.S. from looking after its own interests "when the chips are finally down." And last year, shortly after the tragic failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, President Kennedy declared: "Let the record show that our restraint is not inexhaustible. Should it ever appear that the inter-American doctrine of noninterference merely conceals or excuses a policy of non-action—if the nations of this hemisphere should fail to meet their commitments against outside Communist penetration—then I want it clearly understood that this Government will not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations, which are to the security of our own nation."

Multilateral Flypaper. So the Rio Pact did not erase the Monroe Doctrine. It only tangled the doctrine up in a lot of multilateral flypaper. Before the U.S. can invoke its own Monroe Doctrine, it must theoretically exhaust the possibilities of action under the Rio Pact. But the Rio Pact machinery would be an awkward means of coping even with overt armed attack; and it has proved to be hopeless as a way of grappling with Communist penetration by subversion, infiltration and revolution.

The U.S. did deal with Communist infiltration in Guatemala under President Jacobo Arbenz in the 1950s. But in so doing, the U.S. bypassed the inter-American machinery. At the Inter-American Conference in Caracas in 1954, Secretary Dulles persuaded the delegates to pass a resolution declaring that domination "of any American state by the international Communist movement" would call for an inter-American meeting "to consider the adoption of measures in accordance with existing treaties" (Arbenz' Guatemala voted against; Argentina and Mexico abstained). But no inter-American action followed these words; what toppled Arbenz from power was an invasion led by Guatemalan exiles and covertly sponsored by the U.S.

Communist Cuba is a far graver challenge to the U.S. and the hemisphere than Guatemala could ever have been. It is often argued that the Monroe Doctrine, the product of a simpler time, applies only to old-fashioned aggression. But in his wisdom, Monroe spoke for generations unborn and perils un-envisioned. What he declared to be dangerous to the U.S.'s peace and safety was "any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere . . . interposition in any form." That unmistakably applies to Cuba in 1962.

Just Get It Over With. What could the U.S. do if it decided to act on its own, invoking the Monroe Doctrine? The choices are difficult and narrowing fast. Just 17 months ago, President Kennedy had a real chance to blast Castro out of power; but at the crucial moment of the U.S.-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion, Kennedy called off the promised U.S. air cover. Today Castro's Cuba, propped up by Soviet economic and military support, is far more dangerous than it was then. The time is gone when it might be possible for Cuban exiles, no matter how much U.S. support they might get, to reclaim their homeland. And unless Castro launches an open, large-scale military attack against one of his neighbors, there is no prospect that the Organization of American States will undertake decisive action against Castro.

What remains? Some advocates of action call for a U.S. naval blockade to halt shipments of military supplies to Cuba. But that would involve grave risks (it would mean trying to stop Russian ships on the high seas) without really solving the Castro problem. The only possibility that promises a quick end to Castro—if that is what is wanted—is a direct U.S. invasion of Cuba, carried out with sufficient force to get the job done with surgical speed and efficiency.

Many Latin American leaders would welcome, either openly or secretly, just such U.S. action against Cuba. Most of Castro's closest Caribbean neighbors—Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic—have quietly informed the U.S. that they would back a U.S. invasion. Says Peru's Victor Andres Belaunde, former President of the U.N. General Assembly: "The presence of Russian troops in Cuba demands decisive action on the part of the U.S. I don't think Latin reaction to the U.S. action against Cuba will be unfavorable."

But the Cuba situation continues to haunt the Kennedy Administration. To Kennedy, personally, it is a bone in the throat. He would like nothing better than to get the whole thing over with, by whatever means. For all his stylish public pronouncements, in private Kennedy is wont to hark back to the Bay of Pigs opportunity and to muse regretfully: "I wonder if . . ."

One Administration argument against direct action to oust Castro is that Khrushchev might retaliate by stirring up trouble in other parts of the world, possibly setting off a thermonuclear war. But if Khrushchev wants such a war, he can start it or set it off any time he wants. And if—as can be presumed from the record of recent history—he does not want such a war, it is improbable that he would feel compelled to risk thermonuclear destruction to save Castro.

When action is risky and painful, it is always tempting to men and to nations to delay in the hope that it will prove unnecessary. But history shows that postponement often increases the pain. As he ponders his problem, John Kennedy, a student of history, might well recall what James Monroe, that cautious President, wrote to Jefferson in 1822, the year before promulgating the doctrine that bears his name. Monroe was explaining his decision to risk European anger by recognizing the revolutionary governments of Latin America. "There was danger in standing still or moving forward," he wrote. "I thought it was the wisest policy to risk that which was incident to the latter course."

— In one version of history, Monroe's victory brought on George Washington's death. News of the election results, the story runs, reached Mount Vernon on a snowy December evening just as Washington, tired, cold and wet, returned home from a tour on horseback. Still bitter toward his former Minister to France, Washington talked long and angrily about the election without taking time to change into dry clothes. Chilled, he fell sick with acute laryngitis, died 48 hours later. — Elector William Plumer of New Hampshire cast his ballot for John Quincy Adams, who said the vote caused him "surprise and mortification." Plumer later explained that he felt the honor of unanimity should be reserved for George Washington.

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