

THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH: DECODING INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY STANCE

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It is beyond doubt that the outcome of the war in Ukraine will shape the contours of a new world order. This conflict will redefine the global world order just as World War I, World War II, the Cold War and the end of the Cold War did. A new iron curtain seems to be descending across the world that is already being described as a divide between 'democracies and autocracies'. It goes without saying that in the world of realpolitik the only thing that is permanent are 'interests' underpinned by the innate flexibility of nation states to respond to the swift pace of events and circumstances. India and several other countries of the global South face geo-strategic pressures as they calibrate their positions in regard to the ongoing war in Ukraine. The moot question therefore is: where does India's national interest lie on the Ukrainian question? India has reiterated in every forum that there will be no winning side in this conflict and only a negotiated peace settlement can offer a lasting solution. The Indian stance of neutrality, marked by several abstentions during voting in the UN Security Council and also on other UN resolutions that condemned Russia as an aggressor state, has drawn international attention. There has been a series of high profile visits of Western leaders to New Delhi as efforts are still on to convince India to shift position and be on the 'right side of history'. Indian strategic thinkers believe that in a largely unsettled, non-normative unstable multipolar world, India needs to focus on its domestic growth and other core national interests. Maintaining strategic neutrality is a means to that end. This paper will broadly focus upon the ongoing debate about India's foreign policy stance with regards to the war in Ukraine and the larger issues that have emerged out of it.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, India, Global South

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ВОЙНА НА УКРАИНЕ И ГЛОБАЛЬНЫЙ ЮГ: РАСШИФРОВКА ВНЕШНЕПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ ПОЗИЦИИ ИНДИИ

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Не вызывает сомнений, что исход войны на Украине предопределит контуры нового миропорядка. Этот конфликт так же изменит глобальный мир, как это сделали две мировые войны, холодная война и ее окончание. На мир опускается новый «железный занавес», который уже определяют как водораздел между «демократиями и автократиями». Очевидно, что в мире реальной политики единственное, что постоянно — это «интересы», в основе которых — способность наций гибко реагировать на быстрые изменения событий и обстоятельств. Индия и ряд других стран глобального Юга противостоят геостратегическому давлению, когда определяют свои позиции по войне на Украине. Вопрос, таким образом, состоит в следующем: каковы национальные интересы Индии в украинском вопросе? Индия повторяет на каждом форуме, что у конфликта не будет победителей, и только мирные перегово-

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воры могут принести надежное разрешение проблемы. Индийская нейтральная позиция, заявленная несколько раз, когда Индия воздерживалась при голосовании в Совете Безопасности ООН и других форумах по резолюциям, осуждающим Россию как агрессора, привлекла международное внимание. Последовала серия визитов высокопоставленных лиц Запада, пытающихся убедить Индию в необходимости изменить позицию и «встать на правильную сторону истории». Индийские стратеги полагают, что в нестабильном, лишенном нормативов многополярном мире Индия должна сосредоточиться на проблемах внутреннего развития и прочих основополагающих национальных интересах. Поддержание стратегического нейтралитета является средством для достижения этой цели. В центре статьи — продолжающиеся дебаты по поводу индийской внешней политики в контексте войны на Украине и связанные с этим проблемы.

Ключевые слова: Украина, Россия, Индия, глобальный Юг.

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2022, speaking at the Raisina Dialogue, India's premier foreign policy conference hosted in New Delhi, the Indian foreign minister made a very pertinent point about how India perceives itself in an increasingly chaotic world. He said that India at 75 years of its independence stands at a juncture where it should put behind the idea that it needs to get approval from other quarters on how it engages with the world. He further said that it is better to engage with the world on the basis of 'who we are' rather than try and please the world by being a pale imitation of what they are². This in short sums India's stance on the War in Ukraine — a war that has altered the trajectory of international relations, a war that many analysts believe is leading to a prolonged phase of de-globalization and regionalisation. It is a war that has created a world in which politics has come to triumph over economics. It is also a war that has resulted in the re-orientation of foreign policies of most states around the world. It is a war that is redefining the global world order just as World War I, World War II, the Cold War and the end of the Cold War did.

At the centre of the current disruption, is the idea of managing power transitions and the reformation of a world order, post the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The end of the Cold War, though it significantly altered the global balance of power, it did not yield space for the accommodation of the other stakeholder into the post-war settlement. The framework crafted was blatantly one-sided and the core security concerns of the so-called 'defeated power' was completely ignored and side-tracked. Consequently, the geopolitical developments in the past decade or so suggests that the power balance, particularly the military balance has been shifting to a point where the US and European Union (EU) defined security ideas relating to the European continent has become simply unattainable. This zero-sum like situation did not emerge overnight. It had been evolving for nearly two decades and there were sufficient warning signals that were largely being ignored. The West has been unwilling to accept Russia's resurgence in the post-Cold War era. Its key agenda, as evident from the NATO's eastward expansion since 1999, and the colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine that culminated in the US supported coup in Ukraine in 2014, has been the hostile en-

² Need to put behind idea that others define India: Jaishankar. *India Today*. April 27, 2022. URL: <https://india-today.in/india/story/jaishankar-idea-of-india-world-raisina-dialogue-ukraine-war-1942580-2022-04-27> (дата обращения 04.10.2022).

circlement of Russia under the NATO umbrella³. The massive NATO deployments against Russia has seriously affected Russia's land, air, sea, space, cyber and cognitive operational domains. The inclusion of Sweden and Finland into the NATO fold would only amplify Russia's security concerns. The length of land borders between NATO and Russia will become even bigger and would extend to nearly 2500 km. Russia's access to its enclave in Kaliningrad also gets restricted⁴.

CLEANSER OF ILLUSIONS

A global crisis as big as this has proved to be a cleanser of illusions and also a clarifier of minds. It also provides opportunities for states to reorder global relations through enlightened statesmanship in ways that provide long-term stability. There are also important lessons to be learnt, especially for the countries of the Global South. The foremost lesson is the realisation that the crafting of a global security architecture and its underlying philosophy cannot be the sole prerogative of any single bloc of states. The responsibility of constructing a stable world order has to be a collective exercise and the responsibility rests jointly with the emerging powers as much as with the established powers.

It is significant that unlike the European security architecture, Asia's security architecture with its diverse and even contradictory ideas, concept and networks can offer valuable lessons in accommodation. The Asian security architecture has multiple arrangements and each arrangement has had its own unique trajectory⁵. There are conventional military alliances where members have accepted a loss of strategic autonomy in exchange of security guarantees and membership in a closed security community. Then there are looser security partnerships that do not oblige members to spell out prior commitments or pledge their military establishments into an interoperable network like the NATO. Moreover, there are neutral states or groups that have opted for positive ties with the major contesting powers. These states pursue foreign policies that are not driven from the ideological positioning of any of the major power centres. States like India fall into this categorisation. India's pursuit of independent foreign and security policies is routed through its engagements in several bilateral and multilateral networks and institutions⁶.

For much too long, it was believed that the absence of a European-style security architecture in Asia would be Asia's biggest impediment. But what is now increasingly evident is that the Asian diversity or complexity actually offers a template to the world on the possibilities of reimagining a world order that is both legitimate and stable besides being sufficiently potent to produce some kind of balance among the major global or regional players⁷. In the chaos driven environment of our times, the major challenge for Indian foreign policy is to navigate through the prevailing chaos without compromising on India's core interests⁸.

³ Bhadrakumar M. K. Message from Moscow. *The Indian Express*. September 23, 2022. URL: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/message-from-moscow-russia-ukraine-us-8167396/> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Cronin P. M. The 3 Pillars of Asia's New Security Architecture. *The Straits Times*. October 02, 2021. URL: <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-3-pillars-of-asias-new-security-architecture> (дата обращения 02.10.2022).

⁶ Singh D. Z. Ukraine crisis vindicates core tenets of India's foreign policy. *Times of India*. April 17, 2022. URL: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/ukraine-crisis-vindicates-core-tenets-ofindias-foreign-policy/> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Narayanan M. K. Positioning India in a Chaotic World. *The Hindu*. September 21, 2022. URL: <https://thehindu.com/opinion/lead/positioning-india-in-a-chaotic-world/article65914970.ece> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

INDIA'S STANCE ON THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Ever since Russia launched its 'Special Military Operation' in Ukraine, India has been navigating a diplomatic minefield. India and some other countries of the Global South have been facing geo-strategic pressures as they calibrate their positions. The strategic thinking in India is driven by the belief that in an unsettled, non-normative unstable multi-polar world with many uncertainties, India needs to focus on domestic growth⁹. There are huge challenges in the domestic front that needs to be urgently addressed. India therefore will endeavour to pursue strategic neutrality in pursuit of its national interests.

Further, it has to be noted that the Global South has internalised the contradictions and double standards of moral grounds where normative principles of human rights coincide with geo-strategic interests. The Colour revolutions in the Eurasian space, the US/NATO interventions and bombing in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan and many other examples in the past two decades is a case in point. Going further back, there is the NATO's 78 day bombing of the capital city Belgrade without a mandate from the United Nations (UN). In fact, examples abound to reveal a well-defined pattern in the West's operations in its quest for dominance. India has dubbed the war in Ukraine as a 'wake-up call'. Speaking to foreign ministers from European countries in the Raisina Dialogue, the Indian foreign minister Mr. Jaishankar pointed out that the war indeed was a 'wake-up call' especially for Europe that was habituated to ignore developments in Asia. He pointed out that the double standards in implementing human rights and calling out only selective wars as 'wars of aggression' has led to a delegitimisation of multilateral institutions and had resulted in a world that had become insecure for all. Developments in Asia also merited a serious consideration by the international community. He further pointed out that the manner in which the international community particularly the Global South had responded to the current crisis revealed beyond doubt that the principle 'either you are with us or against us' no longer works¹⁰.

The strategy to form an international coalition to completely isolate Russia is akin to a vision of a renewed unipolar world. From the perspective of the Global South, such a world would demand allegiance and will be in no mood to tolerate neutrality, non-alignment or strategic autonomy that characterises the positions taken by India and many other developing countries. This also puts under serious threat the attempts to forge a multi-polar world that several countries, notably those of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) aspire for¹¹. What is particularly noteworthy in this context is that unlike the Central East European countries, developing countries do not see Russia as a threat or as a former colonial and racist power. Hence, they are comfortable engaging with Russia and are reluctant to be a part of any alliance targeting Russia. Moreover, there is also an understanding, backed by evidence that suggests the current war is more in the nature of proxy war between Russia and the US/NATO. The massive supply of weapons to Ukraine by the West is as per the land-lease debt agreement whereby Ukraine is expected to make payments in cash

⁹ Chenoy A. The Russia-Ukraine War. *Economic and Political Weekly*. April 16, 2022. URL: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2022/16/commentary/russia%E2%80%93ukraine-war-and-changing-world-order.html> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

¹⁰ Happenings in Asia should worry Europe, says Jaishankar as he hits back. *The Economic Times*. April 27, 2022. URL: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/happenings-in-asia-should-worry-europe-jaishankar-hits-back/articleshow/91108651.cms> (дата обращения 3.10.2022).

¹¹ Chenoy A. The Russia-Ukraine War. *Economic and Political Weekly*. April 16, 2022. URL: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2022/16/commentary/russia%E2%80%93ukraine-war-and-changing-world-order.html> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

or kind. Already Ukraine's prime rich farmlands and its grain trade worth 16.7 million hectares are in the control of GMO cartel companies¹². The War is generating lucrative profits for the Americas military-industrial complexes. It is not without reason that President Putin's address on 30 September 2022 formally announcing the accession of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions of Eastern Ukraine to the Russian Federation resonated with many countries of the Global South whose own experience of colonial plunder and loot remains very much embedded in their national consciousness¹³.

THE STRATEGIC LOGIC DRIVING INDIA'S STANCE ON THE WAR

One of the most visible fallout of the war is that it has dramatically changed the way nations have started thinking about their security, not just the European states. Pragmatic choices that is reflective of the realist world are driving foreign policy choices. The choices emanates from the belief that nations have core interests and any kind of weakness in this regard is considered to be a cardinal sin. India recognises that the war in Ukraine has a history, context and also a background and hence the Indian response cannot be divorced from this reality. This war has vindicated the core tenets of India's foreign policy, central to which is the ability and conviction to pursue partnerships with great powers that might be locked in competition with each other. Despite all the public critiques of India 'not being on the right side of history' or threats of 'consequences' for those who don't fall in line, the Biden administration has grudgingly accepted the 'India-Russia relations is distinct from Washington's equation with Moscow'¹⁴. India therefore will continue to pursue positive ties with Moscow while simultaneous building a partnership with Washington. India is entitled to make its own choices, which will be a balance of its values and interests¹⁵. A multipolar world makes this realpolitik approach natural and prudent.

The fundamental strategic reality that India has to face is the rise of China with which India shares a 2,200 mile disputed border. India's fundamental interests are: (a) promoting a stable balance of power in Asia ; (b) forging and deepening enduring partnerships with states on China's periphery;(c) connecting with continental Eurasia, maritime South East Asia and the Russian Far East; (d) striving for a reformed geo-economic system of trade and investment (e) providing sufficient safeguards for domestic modernisation and industrialisation goals; (f) promoting plural financial and digital systems to check monopolisation by any one national authority or institution; and (g) finally at a normative plane, to advocate a multi-civilizational world order that is open to the idea of embracing global diversity¹⁶.

¹² Bhadrakumar M. K. Message from Moscow. *The Indian Express*. September 23, 2022. URL: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/message-from-moscow-russia-ukraine-us-8167396/> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

¹³ The plunder of India: Putin slams West as Russia annexes Ukraine's 4 regions. *Hindustan Times*. September 30, 2022. URL: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/the-plunder-of-india-putin-slams-west-as-russia-annexes-ukraine-s-4-regions-101664557764761.html> (дата обращения 02.10.2022).

¹⁴ Rajghatta C. Biden officials bat for India amid criticism of New Delhi's stand on Russia-Ukraine spat. *Times of India*. March 10, 2022. URL: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/biden-officials-bat-for-india-amid-criticism-of-new-delhis-stand-on-russia-ukraine-spat/articleshow/90135034.cms> (дата обращения 02.10.2022).

¹⁵ India's foreign policy isn't about sitting on fence: S Jaishankar. *India Today*. June 06, 2022. URL: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/india-foreign-policy-sitting-on-fence-s-jaishankar-globsec-2022-1958080-2022-06-03> (дата обращения 02.10.2022).

¹⁶ Singh D. Z. Ukraine crisis vindicates core tenets of India's foreign policy. *Times of India*. April 17, 2022. URL: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/ukraine-crisis-vindicates-core-tenets-ofindias-foreign-policy/> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

IS IT THE INDIA MOMENT?

In the first week of April 2022, the India Foreign Minister stated in the floor of the Indian Parliament that 'If India has chosen a side, it is the side of peace and India calls for an immediate end of violence'¹⁷. He further stated that in this day and age, dialogue and diplomacy are the right answers to any disputes. This has been the consistent stand of India, in all forums including the UN. In early May 2022, the Indian Prime Minister while on a three-nation tour of Europe stated in a news conference that no party can emerge victorious from this conflict that was severely impacting the poor and developing countries with skyrocketing oil prices, shortage of food grains and fertilisers. Pointing out that every family in the world had been impacted, the PM expressed deep concern about the war's humanitarian impact considering that it is a two-front war — the first being the actual theatre of war and the second being the political and economic effects of this war manifesting as disruptions in supply chains, skyrocketing oil prices, shortage of food grains and fertilisers.

India has been calling for an immediate ceasefire with the insistence that dialogue is the only way to resolve the dispute. This position was once again reiterated on 16 September 2022 when the Indian Prime Minister met the Russian President on the margins of the Shanghai Cooperation (SCO) Summit in Samarkand in Uzbekistan. The PM stressed upon the importance of 'diplomacy and dialogue' as way out of the present crisis that was severely impacting the food, fertiliser and energy security of the whole world. Briefing the media after the one on one meeting between the two leaders, the Indian foreign secretary reiterated that India believes that the path to resolution is only 'through diplomacy and dialogue'¹⁸. This position was once again asserted by the Indian foreign minister a few days later while addressing the 77th UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York. The foreign minister stated that India's straight and honest position is that 'India is on the side of peace and will firmly remain there'. He further said that India is on the side that respects the UN Charter and its founding principles and supports those 'who are struggling to make ends meet, even as they stare at escalating costs of food, fuel and fertilisers'¹⁹.

India is very mindful of the fact that the more serious geopolitical challenges will emerge in the aftermath of this war. The disorienting shake-up in the geopolitical equations will require purposeful partnerships. Partnerships that will enable India to make its own transformations whether in building up its deterrent capabilities or accelerating its own economic and technological transformation. India's position of diplomatic neutrality thus is the outcome of cold calculations factoring in India's core national interests. India relies on Russia for nearly 60 to 70 percent of its defence requirements. This includes both technology transfers and collaborations on defence production. Despite the US sanctions on India's nuclear power programme, post the Pokhran II nuclear tests, Rus-

¹⁷ External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar's statement during reply on discussion under Rule 193 on the Situation in Ukraine in the Parliament. *Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India*. April 06, 2022. URL: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/35159/external+affairs+minister+dr+s+jaishankars+statement+during+reply+on+discussion+under+rule+193+on+the+situation+in+ukraine+in+the+parliament> (дата обращения 03.10.2022).

¹⁸ Haidar S. PM Modi tells Vladimir Putin "now is not an era of war". *The Hindu*. September 17, 2022. URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pm-modi-holds-talks-with-russian-president-vladimir-putin-on-sidelines-of-samarkand-sco-summit/article65899314.ece> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

¹⁹ India Matters More. We Are A Bridge. *NDTV*. September 25, 2022. URL: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/s-jaishankar-united-nations-india-matters-more-we-are-a-bridge-s-jaishankar-on-un-visit-takeaways-3375221> (дата обращения 03.10.2022).

sia has supported India in the construction of its nuclear power plants. Even with regard to the unresolved border issues with China and Pakistan, Russia has positioned itself as India's reliable partner. India is also an energy needy country.

India's Quadrilateral Dialogue (QUAD) partners, the US, Japan, Australia, India's partners in Europe and several ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries, see India as an anchor that could help stabilise the international system. These countries have a stake in India emerging as an influential power and are willing to contribute to that end. This in no way implies that India must downgrade its ties with Russia. There are valid legacy reasons for maintaining positive ties with Russia. In the shifting global geopolitical landscape, it is in India's interest to remain engaged with both Russia and China despite the Sino-Russian commitment to dismantle the existing western dominated international order and their declaration of partnership 'without limits'. India's engagements in the BRICS, SCO and RIC (Russia, India, China) will not only continue but also deepen. Engagement with these partners is also important to gauge how these powers are themselves adjusting to the changing geopolitical equations across the world. However, this does not change the fact that China will remain India's major adversary and security challenge. India, therefore will strive to deepen its all-round partnerships with countries who feel similarly threatened by the Chinese expansionism. The Indo-Pacific is certainly an area of concern considering that India is a sea-locked country and close to 90 per cent of Indian trade is through the Indian Ocean. For India, a multi-polar world also means a multi-polar Asia. The vision that India seeks to promote and is committed to is neither a vision of a Cold War nor a 'great game' that divides the world into blocs and camps.

India believes that it is in its interest to have a harmonious relation with the US, EU and Russia and if possible act as a bridge between these powers. A diminished Russia is not in the interest of the Global South. India's membership of several regional and multilateral bodies is in keeping with India's line of strategic neutrality and a call for return to diplomacy to resolve issues between states²⁰.

The high-profile visits to India since the war began and diplomatic exchanges on the various international forums reveal something substantive. It reflects that India could actually become one of the key architects of a new international order. This sentiment was powerfully flagged by the Indian foreign minister in the recent UNGA address when he said that in the polarized world of our times, India really matters as a 'bridge, a voice, a viewpoint and a channel, at a time when normal diplomacy isn't working that well'²¹. He further added that India today is widely 'perceived' as the voice of the Global South and at a time when normal diplomacy is not working, India with her many relationships across the global spectrum has the ability to communicate and find 'touch points' with different countries and regions²². A similar sentiment was echoed by the Mexican foreign minister in the UN Security Council debate on Ukraine on 23 September 2022, when he proposed the

²⁰ Chenoy A. Why India Won't Take Sides. *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*, October 05, 2022. URL: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/46494/why-india-wont-take-sides> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

²¹ India bridge in polarised world: S. Jaishankar at UN. *The Hindustan Times*, September 26, 2022. URL: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-bridge-in-polarised-world-jaishankar-at-un-101664130882613.html> (дата обращения 03.10.2022).

²² We Are On the Side That... India On Russia-Ukraine War. *NDTV*, September 25, 2022. URL: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/we-are-on-the-side-that-india-on-russia-ukraine-war-3375103> (дата обращения 03.10.2022).

setting up of a committee that should include India's PM Modi, Pope Francis and the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to mediate permanent peace between Russia and Ukraine²³.

CONCLUSION

For India, it is time to think strategically about India's place in the world and to make right choices to significantly advance India's long-term interests. The Indian position regarding the war in Ukraine is based on a realist foreign policy strategy in which a cost-benefit analysis reveals that India needs multiple partnerships during this period of international uncertainty. For India, it is about promoting a world and also about promoting an Asia that does not look like Europe's past or present. India firmly believes that there is no alternative to common and collaborative security, which also has to be inclusive.

The Indian position is unlikely to change, given that there is a broad consensus across the political spectrum in India that the war is a 'proxy war' between US/NATO and Russia and there are interested parties involved in arming the war with the openly stated goal of weakening Russia's capabilities. This is a frightening scenario for the Global South. The Global South does not see Russia as a threat. As the Global South asserts itself geopolitically, its assertions are also visible in the realm of geo-economics through multilateral institutions such as the BRICS, the African Union, the ASEAN. These organisations have been giving voice to the existential threats emanating from climate change, inequalities and increasing militarisation that has been holding the world to ransom²⁴. Neutrality and strategic autonomy has become a viable option for states in the Global South, driven by the understanding that there is no alternative to common and collaborative security which also has to be inclusive. And if the current war is indeed between 'democracies and autocracies' and if it is about securing democracy and human rights, as the West has been propagating, then as the first step the UN and its Security Council should be democratised without further delay.

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²³ Only PM Modi can broker peace between Ukraine, Russia: Mexico at UN. *India Today*. September 23, 2022. URL: <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/pm-modi-panel-broker-peace-between-ukraine-russia-mexico-un-2003773-2022-09-23> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

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