

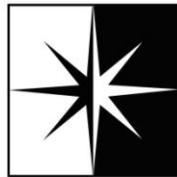
TESTIMONY

Threats to the American Homeland after Killing Bin Laden: An Assessment

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May 25, 2011

Testimony presented before the House Committee on Homeland Security



NEW AMERICA
F O U N D A T I O N

Published 2011 by the New America Foundation
1899 L St NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
Tel. 202.986.2700 Fax. 202.986.3696
www.newamerica.net

Chairman King, Ranking Member Thompson, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to testify today about threats to the American homeland after the death of Osama bin Laden.

The death of bin Laden is devastating to “core” al-Qaeda, but arguably just as important to undermining the terrorist organization is the large amount of information that was recovered at the compound where he was killed in northern Pakistan on May 2, 2011. That information is already being exploited for leads. Between the “Arab Spring” and the death of bin Laden, both al-Qaeda’s ideology and organization are under assault. That said, jihadist terrorism isn’t going away. Regional affiliates such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula remain threatening and there is a continued low-level threat posed by “homegrown” jihadist militants inspired by bin Laden’s ideas.

Such militants might successfully carry out bombings against symbolic targets that would kill dozens, such as against subways in Manhattan, as was the plan in September 2009 of Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan-American al-Qaeda recruit, or they might blow up an American passenger jet, as was the intention three months later of the Nigerian Umar Farouq Abdulmutallab, who had been recruited by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Had that bombing attempt succeeded, it would have killed hundreds. This level of threat is likely to persist for years to come. However, al-Qaeda no longer poses a national security threat to the American homeland of the type that could result in a mass-casualty attack anywhere close to the scale of 9/11.

Indeed, a survey of the 180 individuals indicted or convicted in Islamist terrorism cases in the United States since the 9/11 attacks by the Maxwell School at Syracuse University and the New America Foundation found that none of the cases involved the use of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons, while only four of the homegrown plots since 9/11 progressed to an actual attack in the United States, attacks that resulted in a total of seventeen deaths. The most notable was the 2009 shootings at Ft. Hood, Texas by Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, who killed thirteen. By way of comparison, according to the FBI, between 2001 and 2009, 73 people were killed in hate crimes in the United States.

The number of jihadist terrorism cases involving U.S. citizens or residents has markedly spiked in the past two years. In 2009 and 2010 there were 76, almost half of the total since 9/11, but in the first half of 2011 the number of such cases has subsided rather dramatically. This year there have been a total of just six jihadist terrorism cases by the date of this hearing.

American officials and the wider public should realize that by the law of averages al-Qaeda or an affiliate will succeed in getting some kind of attack through in the next years, and the best response to that would be to demonstrate that we as a society are resilient and are not be intimidated by such actions because our overreactions can play into the hands of the jihadist groups. When al-Qaeda or affiliated groups can provoke overwrought media coverage based on attacks that don’t even succeed -- such as the near-miss on Christmas Day 2009 when Abdulmutallab tried to blow up Northwest Flight 253 over Detroit -- we are doing their work for them. The person who best understood the

benefits of American overreaction was bin Laden himself, who in 2004 said on a tape that aired on Al Jazeera: "All that we have to do is to send two mujahedeen to the furthest point east to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al-Qaeda, in order to make generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic and political losses."ⁱ Let us not give bin Laden any more such victories now that he is dead.

This testimony focuses on the threat from al-Qaeda, its affiliates, and those motivated by its ideas, while recognizing that these are not the only sources of terrorism directed against the United States.

The testimony will attempt to answer four questions:

- What effect will the killing of bin Laden have on U.S. security interests, and on core al-Qaeda's goals and capabilities?
- What threats emanate from Pakistan-based militant groups other than al-Qaeda?
- What threats emanate from al-Qaeda's regional affiliates?
- What threats emanate from domestic militants motivated by jihadist terrorist ideas?

1. What effect will the killing of bin Laden have on U.S. security interests, and on core al-Qaeda's goals and capabilities?

After the fall of the Taliban in the winter of 2001 bin Laden didn't, of course, continue to exert day-to-day control over al-Qaeda, but statements from him have always been the most reliable guide to the future actions of jihadist movements around the world and this remained the case even while he was on the run. In the past decade bin Laden issued more than thirty video- and audiotapes.ⁱⁱ Those messages reached untold millions worldwide via television, the Internet and newspapers. The tapes not only instructed al-Qaeda's followers to continue to kill Westerners and Jews; some also carried specific instructions that militant cells then acted on. In 2003, bin Laden called for attacks against members of the coalition in Iraq; subsequently terrorists bombed commuters on their way to work in Madrid and London. Bin Laden also called for attacks on the Pakistani state in 2007, which is one of the reasons that Pakistan had more than fifty suicide attacks that year.ⁱⁱⁱ In March 2008 bin Laden denounced the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper, which he said would soon be avenged. Three months later, an al-Qaeda suicide attacker bombed the Danish Embassy in Islamabad, killing six.

Bin Laden exercised near-total control over al-Qaeda, whose members had to swear a religious oath personally to bin Laden, so ensuring blind loyalty to him. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the operational commander of the 9/11 attacks, outlined the dictatorial powers that bin Laden exercised over his organization: "If the Shura council at al-Qaeda, the highest authority in the organization, had a majority of 98 percent on a resolution and it is opposed by bin Laden, he has the right to cancel the resolution."^{iv} Bin Laden's son

Omar recalls that the men who worked for al-Qaeda had a habit of requesting permission before they spoke with their leader, saying, “Dear prince: May I speak?”^v

Materials recovered from the Abbottabad compound in northern Pakistan where bin Laden was killed paint a picture of a leader deeply involved in tactical, operational and strategic planning for al-Qaeda, and in communication with other leaders of the group and even the organization’s affiliates overseas.^{vi}

The death of bin Laden eliminates the founder of al-Qaeda, which has only enjoyed one leader since its founding in 1988, and it also eliminates the one man who provided broad, largely unquestioned strategic goals to the wider jihadist movement. Around the world, those who joined al-Qaeda in the past two decades have sworn *baya*, a religious oath of allegiance to bin Laden, rather than to the organization itself, in the same way that Nazi party members swore an oath of fealty to Hitler, rather than to Nazism. That *baya* must now be transferred to whomever the new leader of al-Qaeda is going to be.

Of course, even as the al-Qaeda organization withers there are pretenders to bin Laden’s throne. The first is the dour Egyptian surgeon, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who is the deputy leader of al-Qaeda, and therefore technically bin Laden’s successor. But Zawahiri is not regarded as a natural leader and even among his fellow Egyptian militants Zawahiri is seen as a divisive force and so he is unlikely to be able to step into the role of the paramount leader of al-Qaeda and of the global jihadist movement that was occupied by bin Laden.^{vii} There is scant evidence that Zawahiri has the charisma of bin Laden, nor that he commands the respect bordering on love that was accorded to bin Laden by members of al-Qaeda.

Another possible leader of al-Qaeda is Saif al-Adel, also an Egyptian, who has played a role as a military commander of the terrorist group, and since 9/11 has spent many years living in Iran under some form of house arrest. Adel has been appointed the “caretaker” leader of the terrorist organization, according to Noman Benotman, a former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, a militant organization that was once aligned with al-Qaeda, but has in recent years has renounced al-Qaeda’s ideology.^{viii}

Benotman, who has known the leaders of al-Qaeda for more than two decades and has long been a reliable source of information about the inner workings of the terrorist group, says that based on his personal communications with militants and discussions on jihadist forums, Adel has emerged as the interim leader of al-Qaeda as it reels from the death of its founder and eventually transitions, presumably, to the uncharismatic Zawahiri.

A wild card is that one of bin Laden’s dozen or so sons--endowed with an iconic family name--could eventually rise to take over the terrorist group. Already Saad bin Laden, one of the oldest sons, has played a middle management role in al-Qaeda.^{ix}

One of the key issues that any future leader of al-Qaeda has to reckon with now is dealing with the fallout from the large quantities of sensitive information that were recovered by

U.S. forces at the compound in Abbottabad where bin Laden was killed. That information is likely to prove quite damaging to al-Qaeda's operations.

Jihadist terrorism will not, of course, disappear because of the death of bin Laden. Indeed, the Pakistan Taliban have already mounted attacks in Pakistan that they said were revenge for bin Laden's death,^x but it is hard to imagine two more final endings to the "War on Terror" than the popular revolts against the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and the death of bin Laden. No protestors in the streets of Cairo or Benghazi carried placards of bin Laden's face, and very few demanded the imposition of Taliban-like rule, al-Qaeda's preferred end state for the countries in the region.

If the Arab Spring was a large nail in the coffin of al-Qaeda's ideology, the death of bin Laden was an equally large nail in the coffin of al-Qaeda the organization.

Media stories asserting that al-Qaeda has played no role in the revolts in the Middle East provoked a furious response from the Yemeni-American cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, a leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In his group's *Inspire* magazine, a slick Web-based publication, heavy on photographs and graphics that, unusually for a jihadist organ, is written in colloquial English, Awlaki penned an essay titled "The Tsunami of Change." In the article, Awlaki made the uncontroversial point that the regimes based on fear were ending in the Arab world because of the revolutions and protests from Egypt to Bahrain. But he went on to assert that, contrary to commentators who had written that the Arab revolts represented a total repudiation of al-Qaeda's founding ideology, the world should "know very well that the opposite is the case."^{xi}

Awlaki also turned to this analyst, writing, "for a so-called 'terrorism expert' such as Peter Bergen, it is interesting to see how even he doesn't get it right this time. For him to think that because a Taliban-style regime is not going to take over following the revolutions, is a too short-term way of viewing the unfolding events." In other words: Just you wait—Taliban-type theocracies will be coming to the Middle East as the revolutions there unfold further. Awlaki also wrote that it was wrong to say that al-Qaeda viewed the revolutions in the Middle East with "despair." Instead, he claimed that "the Mujahedeen (holy warriors) around the world are going through a moment of elation and I wonder whether the West is aware of the upsurge in Mujahedeen activity in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Arabia, Algeria and Morocco?"

We do not, of course, know the final outcome of the Arab revolutions, but there is very little chance that al-Qaeda or other extremist groups will be able to grab the reins of power as the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East crumble. But while al-Qaeda and its allies cannot take power anywhere in the Muslim world, these groups do thrive on chaos and civil war. And the whole point of revolutions is that they are inherently unpredictable even to the people who are leading them, so anything could happen in the coming years in Libya and Yemen, and much is unpredictable in Egypt, and even in Saudi Arabia.

2. What threats emanate from Pakistan-based militant groups other than al-Qaeda?

One of bin Laden's most toxic legacies is that even terrorist groups that don't call themselves "Al-Qaeda" have adopted his ideology and a number of South Asian groups now threaten the West. According to Spanish prosecutors, the late leader of the Pakistani Taliban, Baitullah Mehsud sent a team of would-be suicide bombers to Barcelona to attack the subway system there in January 2008. A Pakistani Taliban spokesman confirmed this in a videotaped interview in which he said that those suicide bombers "were under pledge to Baitullah Mehsud" and were sent because of the Spanish military presence in Afghanistan.^{xii}

In 2009 the Pakistani Taliban trained an American recruit for an attack in New York. Faisal Shahzad, who had once worked as a financial analyst in the accounting department at the Elizabeth Arden cosmetics company in Stamford, Connecticut, travelled to Pakistan where he received five days of bomb-making training from the Taliban in the tribal region of Waziristan. Armed with this training and \$12,000 in cash, Shahzad returned to Connecticut where he purchased a Nissan Pathfinder. He placed a bomb in the SUV and detonated it in Times Square on May 1, 2010 around 6 p.m. when the sidewalks were thick with tourists and theatergoers. The bomb, which was designed to act as a fuel-air explosive, luckily was a dud and Shahzad was arrested two days later as he tried to leave JFK airport for Dubai.^{xiii}

Also based in the Pakistani tribal regions are a number of other jihadist groups allied to both the Taliban and al-Qaeda such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union that have trained dozens of Germans for attacks in Europe. Two Germans and a Turkish resident in Germany, for instance, trained in the tribal regions and then planned to bomb the massive US Ramstein airbase in Germany in 2007.^{xiv} Before their arrests, the men had obtained 1,600 pounds of industrial strength hydrogen peroxide, enough to make a number of large bombs.^{xv}

The Mumbai attacks of 2008 showed that bin Laden's ideas about attacking Western and Jewish targets had also spread to Pakistani militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which had previously focused only on Indian targets. Over a three-day period in late November 2008 LeT carried out multiple attacks in Mumbai targeting five-star hotels housing Westerners and a Jewish-American community center. The Pakistani-American David Headley played a key role in LeT's massacre in Mumbai traveling to the Indian financial capital on five extended trips in the two years before the attacks. There Headley made videotapes of the key locations attacked by the ten LeT gunmen including the Taj Mahal and Oberoi hotels and Chabad House, the Jewish community center.^{xvi}

Sometime in 2008, Headley hatched a plan to attack the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, which three years earlier had published cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed that were deemed to be offensive by many Muslims. In January 2009 Headley traveled to Copenhagen, where he reconnoitered the *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper on the pretext that he ran an immigration business that was looking to place some advertising in the paper. Following his trip to Denmark, Headley met with Ilyas Kashmiri in the Pakistani tribal

regions to brief him on his findings. Kashmiri ran a terrorist organization, Harakat-ul-Jihad Islami, closely tied to al-Qaeda. Headley returned to Chicago in mid-June 2009 and was arrested there three months later as he was preparing to leave for Pakistan again. He told investigators that he was planning to kill the *Jyllands-Posten*'s cultural editor who had first commissioned the cartoons as well as the cartoonist Kurt Westergaard who had drawn the cartoon he found most offensive; the Prophet Mohammed with a bomb concealed in his turban.^{xvii}

The Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Harakat-ul-Jihad Islami, the Islamic Jihad Union and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are all based or have a significant presence in Pakistan's tribal regions and have track records of trying to attack Western and/or American targets and should therefore all be considered threats to American interests. The Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Harakat-ul-Jihad Islami have also been able to attract American recruits. Already the Pakistani Taliban has carried out attacks in response to bin Laden's death.^{xviii}

3. What threats emanate from al-Qaeda's regional affiliates?

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born cleric living in Yemen has increasingly taken an operational role in "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," (AQAP) which was responsible for attempting to bring down Northwest Flight 253 over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009 with a bomb secreted in the underwear of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a Nigerian recruit. If Abdulmutallab had succeeded in bringing down the passenger jet, the bombing not only would have killed hundreds but would also have had a large effect on the U.S. economy already reeling from the effect of the worst recession since the Great Depression, and would have devastated the critical aviation and tourism businesses.

President Obama regards Awlaki as so dangerous that he has authorized, seemingly for the first time in American history, the assassination of a U.S. citizen. Awlaki's command of English and Internet savvy helped to radicalize militants such as Major Nidal Hasan who killed thirteen of his fellow soldiers at Ft. Hood Texas in 2009. That attack happened after a series of email exchanges between Hasan and Awlaki in which the cleric said it was religiously sanctioned for Hasan to kill fellow soldiers.^{xix}

In October 2010 AQAP hid bombs in toner cartridges on planes bound for Chicago that were only discovered at the last moment at East Midlands Airport and in Dubai.^{xx} The skillful AQAP bomb-maker who made those bombs is still at large, according to U.S. officials and will continue to attempt to smuggle hard-to-detect bombs on to American or other Western planes.

While carrying out bin Laden's overall strategy of attacking the United States, AQAP was operating largely independent of him and so will not be much affected by bin Laden's death.

Al Shabab

In September 2009, the Somali Islamist insurgent group *Al Shabab* (“the youth” in Arabic) formally pledged allegiance to bin Laden following a two-year period in which it had recruited Somali-Americans and other U.S. Muslims to fight in the war in Somalia.^{xxi} Six months earlier bin Laden had given his imprimatur to the Somali jihad in an audiotape released titled “Fight On, Champions of Somalia.”^{xxii} After it announced its fealty to bin Laden, Shabab was able to recruit larger numbers of foreign fighters, by one estimate up to 1,200 were working with the group by 2010. Today, Shabab controls much of southern Somalia.^{xxiii} Worryingly, Shabab has shown an ability to send its operatives outside of Somalia, killing dozens in suicide attacks in Uganda last year^{xxiv} and dispatching an assassin to Denmark to kill Kurt Westergaard, the Danish cartoonist who had drawn the cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed that were deemed to be offensive. The cartoonist only survived the assault because he had taken the precaution of installing a safe room in his house.^{xxv}

Shabab has managed to plant al-Qaeda-like ideas into the heads of even its American recruits. Shirwa Ahmed, an ethnic Somali, graduated from high school in Minneapolis in 2003, and then worked pushing passengers in wheelchairs at Minneapolis Airport. In late 2007 Ahmed traveled to Somalia and a year later, on October 29, 2008, Ahmed drove a truck loaded with explosives towards a government compound in Puntland, northern Somalia, blowing himself up and killing about twenty people. The FBI matched Ahmed’s finger, recovered at the scene of the bombing, to fingerprints already on file for him. Ahmed was the first American suicide attacker anywhere.^{xxvi}

Given the high death rate for the Americans fighting in Somalia, as well as the considerable attention this group has received from the FBI, it is unlikely that the couple of dozen American veterans of the Somali war pose much of a threat to the United States itself. It is however, plausible now that Shabab had declared itself to be an al-Qaeda affiliate, that U.S. citizens in the group might be recruited to engage in anti-American operations overseas.

Shabab has operated independently of al-Qaeda “core” and so will not be much affected by bin Laden’s death.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)

In 2008 there was a sense that Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was on the verge of defeat. The American ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker said, “You are not going to hear me say that al-Qaeda is defeated, but they’ve never been closer to defeat than they are now.”^{xxvii} Certainly AQI has lost its ability to control large swaths of the country and a good chunk of the Sunni population as it did in 2006, but the group has proven surprisingly resilient as demonstrated by the fact that it pulled off large-scale bombings in central Baghdad in 2010 and 2011. AQI has also shown some ability to carry out operations outside Iraq as well: it attacked three American hotels in Amman, Jordan in 2005^{xxviii} and it had some sort of role in the attacks on Glasgow Airport two years later.^{xxix} As U.S. forces pull

down in Iraq, AQI may be tempted to mount other out-of-country attacks against American or Western targets.

The death of bin Laden is unlikely to affect AQI much.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

In September 2006 the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat's leader Abu Musab Abdul Wadud, explained that al-Qaeda "is the only organization qualified to gather together the mujahideen." Subsequently taking the name "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb" (AQIM), the group, which had traditionally focused only on Algerian targets, conducted a range of operations: bombing the United Nations building in Algiers; attacking the Israeli embassy in Mauritania; and murdering French and British hostages. AQIM has hitherto not been able to carry out attacks in the West and is one of the weakest of al-Qaeda's affiliates, only having the capacity for infrequent attacks in North Africa.^{xxx}

4. What threats emanate from domestic militants motivated by jihadist terrorist ideas?

The New America Foundation and Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Public Policy examined the 180 post-9/11 cases of Americans or U.S. residents convicted or charged of some form of jihadist terrorist activity directed against the United States, as well as the cases of those American citizens who have traveled overseas to join a jihadist terrorist group.¹ None of the cases we investigated involved individuals plotting with chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons. Given all the post-9/11 concerns about terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction this is one of our more positive findings.

The number of jihadist terrorism cases involving U.S. citizens or residents has spiked in the past two years.² In 2009 and 2010 there were 76, almost half of the total since 9/11. This increase was driven, in part, by plots that could have killed dozens, such as the Pakistani-American Faisal Shahzad's attempt to bomb Times Square in May 2010, but also by the 31 people who were charged with fundraising, recruiting or traveling abroad to fight for the Somali terrorist group, Al-Shabab.

¹ Peter Bergen, Andrew Lebovich, Matthew Reed, Laura Hohnsbeen, Nicole Salter, and Sophie Schmidt at the New America Foundation, and Professor William Banks, Alyssa Procopio, Jason Cherish, Joseph Robertson, Matthew Michaelis, Richard Lim, Laura Adams, and Drew Dickinson from the Maxwell School at Syracuse University all worked on creating this database, which is available at <http://homegrown.newamerica.net>.

² Note: From our count we excluded post-9/11 cases in the United States involving either Hezbollah or Hamas as neither group has targeted Americans since 9/11. We did include groups allied to al-Qaeda such as the Somali group Al-Shabab, or that are influenced by al-Qaeda's ideology such as the Pakistani group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which sought out and killed Americans in the Mumbai attacks of 2008. We also included individuals motivated by al-Qaeda's ideology of violence directed at the United States.

In 2002 there were 16 jihadist terrorism cases, in 2003 there were 23, in 2004 there were 8, in 2005 there were 12, in 2006 there were 18, in 2007 there were 16, in 2008 there were 5, in 2009 there were a record 43, in 2010 there were 33, and in 2011 the number of such cases has subsided rather dramatically: There were 6.

The total number of deaths from jihadist-terrorist attacks in the United States after 9/11 totals 17. Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan is accused of opening fire at a readiness center at Fort Hood, Texas in 2009, killing 13; Hesham Mohamed Hadayat killed two people at the El Al counter at Los Angeles International Airport in 2002 before being shot dead by an El Al security guard; Naveed Haq was found guilty of killing one person at a Jewish center in Seattle in 2006; and Carlos Bledsoe (aka Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammed) is accused of killing one soldier and wounding another at a U.S. Army recruiting center in Arkansas in 2009.

The U.S. military, fighting wars of various kinds in five Muslim countries, is firmly in the crosshairs of homegrown jihadist militants. Around one in three of the cases examined by the Maxwell School and New America involved a U.S. military target, ranging from Quantico Marine Base in Virginia to American soldiers serving overseas. We found 57 individuals who were targeting US military facilities or personnel both at home and abroad; 35% of the cases. Bryant Neal Vinas, for instance, a Long Island native admitted in 2009 to taking part in a rocket attack on a U.S. base in Afghanistan, while in North Carolina Daniel Boyd, a charismatic convert to Islam who had fought in the jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviets, had some kind of plan to attack American soldiers. Boyd obtained maps of Quantico Marine Base in Virginia, which he cased for a possible attack on June 12, 2009.^{xxx}

Rather than being the uneducated, young Arab-American immigrants of popular imagination, the homegrown militants do not fit any particular socio-economic or ethnic profile. Their average age is thirty. Of the cases for which ethnicity could be determined, only a quarter are of Arab descent, while 10% are African-American, 13% are Caucasian, 18% are South Asian, 20% are of Somali descent, and the rest are either mixed race or of other ethnicities. About half the cases involved a U.S-born American citizen, while another third were naturalized citizens. And of the 94 cases where education could be ascertained, two thirds pursued at least some college courses, and one in ten had completed a Masters, PhD or doctoral equivalent.

ⁱ Osama bin Laden, tape released November 1, 2004, http://articles.cnn.com/2004-11-01/world/binladen.tape_1_al-jazeera-qaeda-bin?s=PM:WORLD.

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