

Sudan: Prospects for Democracy

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Overview

1. This briefing covers domestic and regional political dynamics and the prospects for democratization in Sudan. One month after the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir, there are major obstacles to the formation of a civilian government, and (more importantly) no inclusive elite pact.
2. Sudan is a rentier political-economy with high material requirements for sustaining the key political constituencies, and as such political stability requires either a consolidated central authority able to control the security arena, a collusive arrangement among the key powerbrokers, or a structural change in the political economy towards a non-rentier system (which will take time). Currently it has none of the above.
3. The Transitional Military Council (TMC) represents several segments of the former regime, which have yet to determine an internal formula for wielding power. Nor have they consolidated political legitimacy and military-security hegemony. The TMC's priority challenge is managing potential challengers in the security arena with limited resources and intelligence. Major threats arise from the Islamists and NISS. Additionally, as the TMC focuses its efforts on consolidating the centre it runs risks of neglecting the provinces where intercommunal violence, violent protests, rebellion by discontented security units, or ungovernability are real possibilities.
4. The Alliance of Freedom and Change (AFC) is drawn from a particular cross-section of Sudanese society: professionals, vestiges of organized labour, and middle-class urban youth, backed by some businesses and in tactical alliance with a much broader swathe of discontented people, principally from the inner peripheries (where the demonstrations started). Others aligned with the AFC (older political parties, and especially the armed opposition groups) are concerned that the AFC negotiating team may not represent their interests. In the absence of parties based on organized social and economic interests, civilian politics is fluid, tactical and personality-driven.

5. Sudan is politically integrated into the dynamics of the Middle East. Following the 11 April revolution, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt stepped in with financial and political support for the TMC, conditional on Sudan remaining part of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and taking a political line against the Muslim Brothers, along with Qatar and Turkey. The short-term viability of the TMC is dependent on this financial package, but the bailout cannot resolve the deeper economic crisis.

The Negotiations to Form a Government

6. The focal point of political process in Sudan is the negotiations between the TMC and the AFC over the structure and powers, composition and length of mandate of the interim government. Both the TMC and AFC are under strong pressure to reach agreement but face internal obstacles to agreeing positions and strategies, as well as differences between the them. Negotiations began on 27 April and were suspended after two days. There followed two weeks of negotiation by press statement, during which time each realized the political costs of failing to agree. Direct talks resumed on 13 May. These made progress before they were suspended as a result of violence between security officers and protesters.

7. Since 11 April, the TMC has incrementally assumed the powers of government, including making public statements on behalf of the Sudanese state, issuing executive orders, banning and dismantling selected institutions, arresting individuals, and conducting foreign relations. Immediately following the impasse of the first round of talks (on 30 April) the TMC issued decrees that indicated its readiness to assume executive power as a military junta. Some of its statements, such as Gen. Hemedti's insulting description of the protesters smacked of a taste for dictatorship. If the violent attacks on demonstrators on 13 and 15 May were indeed the work of RSF units, as appears likely, that also indicates a low threshold for using force.

8. The AFC has maintained its pressure through its public relations and through maintaining its presence on the streets, including preventing movement around the capital. This pressure is causing some fissures within the opposition coalition, with some more accommodating elements (e.g. Sadiq al Mahdi) anxious not to provoke the military.

9. Neither the TMC nor the AFC appears to have a clear decision-making process, and the rationale for each proposal made (or opposed) is not always evident. The core area of agreement is the overall formula, that there should be a time-limited transitional government consisting of a sovereign council or transitional presidential council (a Sudanese tradition), an executive, and an appointed parliament. The two sides reached elementary compromises on the length of the transitional period (three years, splitting the

difference between their respective proposals) and the composition of the interim parliament. The TMC had floated a quick transition, knowing that this would empower more conservative, better organized parties; the AFC wanted longer, in order to consolidate its power base and uproot what it calls the 'deep state.'

10. The sovereign council has emerged as the particular focus of controversy. Much hinges on the definition of the power of this council: whether it is to safeguard national sovereignty or to exercise sovereign powers (in which case a civilian cabinet would be a secondary actor). The TMC has proposed that the council should be able to impose a state of emergency, declare war, take command of regular forces, and appoint state governors and ambassadors.

11. The TMC announcement that it would keep Islamic law sharpened the divide with the AFC. It is a step towards the TMC establishing its own civilian support base, bringing in some conservative groups (such as Salafis) and possibly peeling off the sectarian parties from the AFC.

12. The leaders of the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) have accepted that returning to Khartoum politics is their best chance of furthering their political agendas, and the debate among their leaders is how best to join the political process, not whether they should do so. The Sudan Liberation Movement (Abdel Wahid al Nur) and SPLM-N (Abdel Aziz al Hilu) have stronger demands that are more difficult to negotiate, but will not want to be isolated. The non-belligerence of the armed groups is important: had they vowed to fight on in the cause of a more 'genuine' revolution, they could have condemned the democratic transition to failure even before it started.

13. The SRF is optimistic that the TMC and AFC are jointly making peace negotiations a priority. However, there are still underlying tensions between the armed movements and their allies in the Sudan Call coalition, which is represented in the negotiations by leading members of the political parties drawn from the riverian elite, who are not fully trusted by the people of the far peripheries.

Sudan's Political Marketplace and Economy

14. There is no general formula for success in a revolutionary transition to democracy. No lessons are meaningful outside a specific political-economic analysis. Sudan's third successful non-violent popular uprising invites comparisons with its predecessors in 1964 and 1985, as well as the 2011 'Arab Spring' and the partial democratization of the CPA Interim Period. The disappointing outcomes of most of those experiences indicate the pitfalls of radical transitions to democracy, but provide few indicators for trajectories of

change. It is better to analyze the uprising in the context of the Sudanese political economy and in particular the material factors determining the organization of political life.

15. In the years 1999-2011, Sudan became an oil-based rentier political economy. The dividends of the oil boom were primarily devoted to building a political constituency to protect the NCP from internal challenge, using extensive patronage concentrated in Khartoum and the 'inner periphery' (reaching from el Obeid to Kassala, Atbara to Sennar, also including Port Sudan), and to building a massive military apparatus to meet security challenges in Darfur, South Sudan and the Two Areas. In the years since 2011, without oil money, the regime faced the challenges of: (a) securing alternative finance; (b) maintaining its constituency; and (c) feeding the vast, hydra-headed military-security apparatus. It succeeded in none of the above, but its efforts shaped the way in which it fell and what has happened since.

16. The regime's strategy for alternative political finance focused on artisanal gold, agricultural investment, and Middle Eastern patronage. Each had a cost. To monopolize gold sales, the government had to buy at above market rates using Sudanese pounds, obtaining hard currency through an inflationary strategy, while labour standards and environmental despoliation caused discontent. Agricultural investment could be attracted only on disadvantageous terms for the local populace and the long-term returns to the country. Middle Eastern political patronage demanded playing a delicate game of balancing: deploying troops in Yemen in support of the Saudi-Emirati coalition; inviting Turkey to establish a base on the Red Sea and cooperating with Qatar; and backing various factions in Libya. This was unsustainable: each Middle Eastern patron treated Sudan warily and kept Khartoum on a financial drip-feed. Ultimately, Pres. al-Bashir ran out of money to pay the demands of his subalterns; the constituency that had backed the NCP in the 2000s became disaffected; and the economy suffered hyperinflation.

17. Sudan's 'deep state' does not resemble that of (for example) Egypt, Syria or Turkey. The inherited technocratic bureaucracies that managed the irrigated sector and the civil service long ago withered. They were replaced in the years of austerity (mid-1980s-1999) by hybrid Islamist institutions that spanned governance, business, charity and the security sector, which were in turn either eviscerated in the crackdown on the radical Islamists after 1999 or became patronage-and-corruption vehicles during the oil boom. These crony capitalist networks have been damaged but not eliminated during the recent economic crisis. At root, the task of eradicating this 'deep state' is not a political purge but an economic reform: shifting the economy away from crony capitalism to a system based on domestic capitalists who are engaged in productive activities, not reliant on state patronage. Switching from oil-based rentierism to security cooperation-based rentierism will not address this challenge. Worse would be if figures in the TMC were themselves to

take over the businesses owned by the NCP and NISS, simply appropriating the kleptocratic system for their own purposes. This scenario is avoidable: fortunately, the Sudanese business class is sufficiently broad and capable that there is a strong foundation on which to build a productive capitalist sector.

18. The economic collapse of the last three years, leading to hyperinflation, was one of the causes of the protests, at the same time as eviscerating the capacity of the regime to sustain itself. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have promised a bailout consisting of \$500 million in cash (half has been delivered) and \$2.5 billion in essential commodities (wheat, fuel and medicine). If delivered promptly and if efficiently managed, this could stave off further deterioration until the end of 2019. It does not address the structural issues in the economy.

Composition of the TMC and its Challenges

19. The TMC is comprised of a duopoly between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), marginalizing or excluding other elements in the security arena (NISS, the Popular Defence Forces, various other paramilitaries).

20. The social base of the SAF officer corps is the metropolitan educated administrative class, previously known as the '*effendiya*' or the 'modern forces.' The younger generation of this class was on the streets protesting. The economic base of the SAF officer corps is military procurement and military industries, associated with procurement corruption and rentierism. For more than a generation, SAF has been less a war-fighting institution than a political finance laundering mechanism. This weakness is reflected in the political low profile of the chairman of the TMC, Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

21. Although the RSF originated in Darfurian Arabs mobilized for counter-insurgency in 2003-04, its social base has since broadened. It has recruited from the subaltern class of the inner peripheries, the same social stratum that formed the NCP constituency of the oil boom years, which switched to protest in the last six months. Its economic base is state patronage, in turn associated with security cooperation agreements with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and (to a much lesser degree) the European Union. The RSF is a lean and effective war-fighting institution. Its confidence is reflected in the prominent role of its senior commander, Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Daglo 'Hemedti'. It is notable that Hemedti has the skills to reach out to the street protesters, and has managed to overcome (in part, for now) the toxic legacy associated with his role in Darfur and close personal association with Pres. al-Bashir.

22. Pres. al-Bashir was overthrown because he could not maintain the unity of the key actors in the security arena in the face of the popular challenge from the protesters. That double challenge is unresolved. The pact between the SAF officer corps and the RSF leadership is based on their common fear of the forces they have deposed or jeopardized, in particular the NCP and NISS, and their joint desperation to secure political funds to manage the demands of the day. The RSF and SAF know that each cannot defeat the other, and that if they divide they will be exposed to a counter-coup by NCP and NISS or will destroy the country in civil conflict. Meanwhile, there are many former NCP and NISS who would be ready to jump ship and join a TMC-led coalition if the material incentives were sufficient. The TMC hopes that it can establish its own civilian support base, parallel to the AFC coalition. However, by the same token, those who have joined the TMC cannot be relied upon to remain loyal, should the leadership appear sufficiently vulnerable.

23. The TMC control over Khartoum is tenuous. Getting the police back on the streets required a cash payout to the leadership of the police force. Key neighbourhoods are de facto controlled by committees of the protesters. In many neighbourhoods, 'popular police' and paramilitaries originally organized by the Islamists remain a potent force. Although the NISS director, Gen. Salah Gosh, has resigned and the TMC has begun to dismantle the NISS as a military force, by bringing its operational units under army command. Nonetheless, NISS has its own funds (scores if not hundreds of companies), intelligence networks, and international connections. It has strong networks in the NCP, which also has control over important commercial networks. There are indications that NISS did not utilize its full capacities to suppress the demonstrations, anticipating that it could benefit from the crisis and be well-positioned to take an enhanced role following the removal of al-Bashir. It is still possible that a version of this scenario will play out.

24. A secondary security challenge for the TMC is maintaining control and discipline in the provinces. The SAF/RSF command in provincial cities is dependent on local bargains with numerous other paramilitary forces. The dismissal of civilian governors (in the February state of emergency declaration) combined with the suspension of the NCP has left the institutions of provincial government weakened. It is likely that local military commanders, alongside RSF, NISS and sundry paramilitary leaders, will cut their own deals, which could include challenges to the centre. It is likely that we will see a flare up in inter-communal disputes, some of them violent, which could easily get out of hand.

Composition of the Civilian Opposition and its Challenges

25. Previous civilian governments in Sudan (1953-58; 1964-69 and 1985-89) consisted of national political parties were founded on business interests (agriculture, trade and—in the case of the Islamists—finance and the informal sector) or organized labour. This is

unlikely to return until there is a fundamental economic restructuring. Since the advent of the oil boom in 1999, civilian politics has been organized on the principle of trading allegiance for material reward, a pattern shown in the hyper-dominance of the NCP and its clients in the elections of 2010 and 2015. The traditional sectarian parties and organized labour were reduced to leaderships with narrow or vestigial constituencies while ethno-regional movements mobilized around grievances over exclusion. The dissolution of the NCP will not change the central role of state-allocated rents in a patronage-based political sphere. Insofar as the TMC will appropriate most state rents to sustain the security arena, the immediate prospect is for a fluid and inconsistent civilian politics with personalities and tactical transactional considerations playing an outsized role.

26. The protests began in the inner periphery among the groups that had benefited from the oil boom and NCP patronage in the 2000s, and which were squeezed in the 2011-18 period. As the protests moved to Khartoum they changed their social composition, drawing on a constituency of young middle class people, the inheritors of an older, idealistic tradition of a modernist nationalism that aspired to transcend ethnic and regional identity, but which reflected the values and aspirations of a relatively small, socially and economically privileged class. This is represented by the combination of the Sudan Professionals Association and the networks of young people organized through social media. This '*effendiya*' class is well-represented in, and connected to, the diaspora in Europe (especially the UK) and North America. Their combination of technical skills (notably in social media), artistic creativity, cosmopolitan liberal values, and economic assets, provided a powerful boost to the protests, and a penetrating challenge to the officer corps of SAF—it was their own children who were facing them on the streets of the capital. The people of the far peripheries (Darfur, the Nuba Mountains) did not feel represented by either social grouping, though large delegations have joined the protests more recently, significantly broadening the social base of the protestors.

27. Earlier civic protests (1964 and 1985) had conjoined professionals with organized labour (railway workers, tenants on irrigated farms, and their political representation through the Sudan Communist Party). In contemporary Sudan, the power of the trade unions has been reduced to near zero. However the SCP continues to play a disproportionately influential role, despite its small constituency and ageing leadership. This comes about because of the consistency of its analysis and its enduring skills at running meetings, keeping the minutes, and writing manifestos and negotiating positions. However, the SCP's political analysis is often outdated and its inflexible positions risk leading the AFC astray.

28. The demonstrators in the street have increasingly begun to organize autonomously, drawing on their practical experience over the last five months, and the ambition drawn

from their triumphs. The leaders of the AFC cannot instruct the street but rather must negotiate with them.

29. The political parties, organized under the Sudan Call, have been a secondary factor in the AFC coalition. They comprise the old sectarian patricians (such as the Umma Party) and the armed opposition in Darfur and the Two Areas (the SRF and others). These are not natural allies; they came together through the structure of the process for political engagement with the NCP/al-Bashir government; and the uprising has highlighted the divergent interests of the different members of this coalition.

30. The armed opposition groups (Darfur and the Two Areas) achieved progress (on paper) in protracted negotiations with the government, under the auspices of the AU High Level Implementation Panel. They are fearful that the TMC and the AFC represent the riverian elite in new clothes, and that the peripheries will (once again) be sold short. However, the armed opposition groups are fragmented and riven by suspicion. The Darfurian armed groups do not trust one another, and are particularly suspicious of Gen. Hemedti whom they describe as 'Janjaweed'. The two factions of the SPLM-North (Agar and al-Hilu) have failed to reunify, with al-Hilu maintaining his position that the Nuba people are entitled to self-determination.

31. The Islamists are divided. Most of the veterans of the Islamist movement have been banished from the political sphere by the TMC and the AFC. Many are under house arrest, and the AFC is insisting that the Islamist power base be systematically dismantled. Other Islamists had withdrawn from the government of al-Bashir and some had joined the protesters. However, despite their divisions and the current political consensus in favour of ostracizing them, the Islamists retain a strong constituency, considerable resources and networks, and political skills gained through decades in power that have not been entirely eroded by corruption. There are serious dangers in excluding the Islamists, in driving them underground, or in selectively embracing some Islamist figures and groups (e.g. Salafis) and excluding others (the Muslim Brothers).

Regional Political Dynamics

32. The al-Bashir government sought to balance its alliances across the divides of Middle Eastern politics. The TMC has aligned itself with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and to reject Qatar and Turkey.

33. Egypt has its own position on Sudanese affairs, independent of its allies in the Gulf (which it regards as clumsy neophytes in their dealings with Africa). The Egyptian position is to support the TMC based on three major conditions: (a) keeping the Sudanese Islamists

out of politics and handing over Egyptian Muslim Brothers to Cairo; (b) terminating the contract for Turkey to construct a naval base in Suakin; and (c) accepting the Egyptian territorial claim to the Halaib Triangle, an area long disputed between the two countries. There is presumably also a set of secondary conditions associated with supporting Egyptian strategy in Libya (where Sudan has been close to Islamist factions) and supporting Egypt on Nile Waters issues. Egypt remained close to Pres. al-Bashir until the final days of his rule, and expressed strong support for Gen. Ahmad Awad Ibn Auf on the first day of the takeover, making it look somewhat exposed when Ibn Auf resigned the next day. (A mis-step that revealed that Egypt underestimates the dynamics of Sudanese politics.) Egypt has taken the lead in pressing for the African Union to recognize the TMC as a legitimate government.

34. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are strong supporters of the TMC. They distanced themselves from al-Bashir, and there were indications that they were ready to allow the demonstrations to unfold to bring al-Bashir down so that he could be replaced with their favoured members of the Khartoum security cabal. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE had their clients within Khartoum's security elite, notably Taha Hussein (former Chef de Cabinet in the presidency, responsible for brokering the deal that brought Sudanese troops to Yemen to fight on behalf of the Saudi-led coalition, and subsequently Africa advisor to Riyadh) and Salah Gosh (primarily an independent powerbroker, but closely aligned with and sponsored by the UAE). Both Gen. al-Burhan and Gen. Hemedti have commanded Sudanese forces in Yemen. One of the earliest TMC statements was a commitment to keeping those forces. The expeditious manner in which Saudi Arabia and the UAE have provided financial assistance indicates that they consider Sudan an integral junior member of their security coalition.

35. Qatar and Turkey are the obvious losers. Their setbacks are symbolized by the refusal of the TMC to invite a Qatari ministerial delegation (and firing the foreign ministry official responsible for proceeding with the plan for the visit) and the scaling back of Turkish involvement in Suakin to merely restoration of historic buildings, abandoning the naval base. Doha will no longer host the Darfur peace process. However, Qatar and Turkey are unlikely to accept these setbacks without planning counter-moves.

36. None of Sudan's sub-Saharan African neighbours is able to play a significant role in Sudan, and several will have causes for concern. Ethiopia currently lacks a foreign policy strategy beyond an ethos of friendliness to all and a favourable disposition towards Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Pres. Idriss Déby of Chad will be concerned that Gen. Hemedti has close family and political ties to Chadian Arabs who are potential rivals to him. Chadian democrats will have another example of a popular uprising to inspire them. The Eritrean president will similarly be concerned about the display of people power in Khartoum and

will be more comfortable with the TMC than the AFC. The leadership of the Central African Republic will be concerned with the demise of the Khartoum regime that had played a leading role in their recent accords.

37. The AU's role has been in the realm of soft power. Through official reports (notably the AU High Level Panel on Darfur) and PSC communiqués, it has provided analysis of the Sudanese predicament that remains highly relevant. The AU is also a custodian of principles, most importantly refusal to recognize unconstitutional change in government. The AU PSC's initial communiqué (15 April) which gave the TMC fifteen days to hand over power to a civilian government was hailed by the AFC as a precious stand on principle. (The formula was an adaptation of the prohibition on unconstitutional changes in government, contained in the AU Constitutive Act, as interpreted by the PSC in the case of the popular uprising in Burkina Faso in 2014, in which the PSC wanted to express its sympathy for the democratic impulses that contributed to the military takeover, without giving the military leaders *carte blanche* to form a government.) Subsequently, and contrary to the rationale for entrusting the PSC with the authority to determine the AU stand on matters of principle such as unconstitutional change in government, there was an external interference in AU decision making that led to a high-profile proposal, made in Cairo, to revise that deadline to 90 days. The second PSC communiqué (30 April), which compromised on 60 days and which included emphatic language insisting that a military takeover of power was not acceptable, was a compromise that allows the AU a window in which it could take initiatives and exercise some leverage. The outcome in Sudan will be a test of the value of the AU norms and principles.

38. The implications of the Sudanese revolution for South Sudan are not yet clear, though Khartoum's influence over South Sudan was already fading in the six months prior to April, and the centre of gravity for the implementation of the R-ARCISS had shifted from the Khartoum-Kampala axis back to IGAD. Many South Sudanese citizens have followed the popular uprising with enthusiasm but the 'Red Card' protests planned for 16 May did not prove significant. Uncertainties over the political settlement in Sudan will hamper the planning of all the major South Sudanese actors. While Riek Machar is the obvious loser on account of losing his protector, Pres. Salva Kiir also has to cope with the weakening of his ties to Khartoum.

Next Steps

39. There is no political settlement in Sudan; no cohesive centre of power; no elite pact; no agreement on the rules of the political game. Many advocates for democratization (e.g. some in the AFC especially those on the street) celebrate the weakness of the TMC. However, there are serious dangers in a weak power centre, especially given the appetite of

the hydra-headed security arena. Democratization is best negotiated between a strong centre and a capable opposition. Sudan will therefore be well served by a consolidated military: the current SAF-RSF alliance could be the foundation for this.

40. Sudanese civic politics has always functioned best as a loosely-structured conversation in which the allocation of power is made on an interim basis, and the complex (possibly insuperable) political questions are debated without being forced to a definitive resolution. In particular, Sudanese have struggled to meet the challenges of political liberalism and governance of diversity at the same time. For this reason, there is much to be said for a long interim period.

41. The recent revolution is an all-Sudanese affair that owes nothing to any external forces. It is good reason for the Sudanese to feel confident that they can address their national challenges. However, there is already intrusive external engagement, in the form of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Such intrusion is not only inevitable but is necessary for inescapable economic reasons. The Troika and AU have not played a comparable role, but have asserted fundamental principles, and as such have withheld legitimacy from the TMC.

42. Two kinds of structural reform are essential. One is the stabilization of the security arena by means of consolidating a central military authority. This cannot be done by force (the SAF-RSF coalition is not strong enough to impose its will); it must be done by negotiation, including with groups such as the PDF, the Islamists, and the opposition armed groups. Integrating the armed groups from Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile into a new army would be an opportunity for a thorough-going reform, including a secularization of the army, with international assistance. However, this requires a high level of transparency about this challenge, which is not something to which military leaders are accustomed. Established 'best practices' of security sector reform are not well-suited to Sudanese circumstances, where the challenges of the security arena are primarily political rather than technical.

43. The second challenge is economic reform. The Saudi-Emirati bailout is an essential first step. But it is a preliminary step only: the funds will quickly run out unless there are rapid steps towards lifting U.S. sanctions and rescheduling the international debt so that Sudan becomes eligible for various forms of concessionary assistance. The immediate requirement is payment of the \$3 bn in arrears to international financial institutions; if this is paid then a package of debt rescheduling, financial assistance and financial normalization can begin. One option would be a short-term bridging loan from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to be repaid from the funds unlocked by the debt rescheduling.

44. Economic and financial normalization would then be a basis for addressing the structural challenge of building a legitimate business sector. An important first step in this regard is a rapid study of the crony capitalist sector (a.k.a. 'deep state') associated with the NCP, NISS and elements in the army. Dismantling this sector will unlock considerable commercial potential.

45. The Troika-African consortium, with the UN, that shepherded the CPA will not be sufficient for these tasks. It will be necessary to involve Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE as full partners, as well as international financial institutions, in a plan for Sudan. The particular added value of the AU and UN lies in their history of analysis of Sudan and adherence to principles for constitutional democracy, governance of diversity, and peacemaking.



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