

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

**“Bureaucratic Decision Making in Troop Rotation Policy for OIF-2”**

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*The decisions and actions of governments are intranational political resultants: resultants in the sense that what happens is not chosen as a solution to a problem but rather results from compromise, conflict and confusion of officials with diverse interests and unequal influence; political in the sense that the activity from which decisions and actions emerge is best characterized as bargaining along regularized channels among individual members of government.*

--Graham Allison & Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*

After the unparalleled successes of the United States led coalition during combat operations in Iraq, the coalition was left with a terrible dilemma—what levels of military capabilities or troop strengths will be necessary to provide a safe and secure environment for reconstruction efforts, commonly referred to as Phase IV operations, to effectively occur. As the process to arrive at a troop rotation policy decision for OIF-2 ensued, U.S. casualties continued to mount and the diversity of opinion on the correct troop rotation policy proliferated with the number of parties interested in the outcome.<sup>1</sup> Much has been made about whether the conflict in Iraq was really linked to the Global War On Terrorism or even consistent with our National Security Strategy (NSS). Furthermore, daily discussions in the media about the levels of our present and future presence in Iraq attempt to second guess the rationale behind this national security decision as it relates to a broader strategy which will enhance the global security interests of the United States. The current NSS clearly promulgates in the most basic terms an idealistic endstate that the United States is working to achieve in the world: “political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the document enumerates several goals that will allow the U.S. to attain this vision:

champion aspirations for human dignity; strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends; work with others to diffuse regional conflicts; prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies and friends with weapons of mass destruction; ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade; expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy; transform America’s national security institutions to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.<sup>3</sup>

This paper attempts to demonstrate that the decision making process for a troop rotation policy in OIF was not a highly structured, detached analytical process arriving at an optimized answer designed to achieve the goals mentioned above. Instead, it was a bureaucratic political process which yielded a pragmatic solution, a result of bargaining and the compromises brought on by organizational influences and the relative power of the people involved in the process.

In order to faithfully examine the process, which resulted in the decision for the troop rotation for OIF-2, we must first outline the evolution of the troop sets from the end of the war in Iraq through OIF-1. On May 1, 2003 President Bush announced the end of major combat operations while aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln. Three weeks later CENTCOM directed CJTF-7, as the military coalition in Iraq is now known, to enter Phase IV of the mission—“Civil Affairs and Humanitarian Assistance Operations”—but the decision making process for what the footprint of subsequent American military efforts in Iraq should look like was already well underway. The illustration below outlines the disposition of coalition forces as of July 23, 2003, well into the conduct of stability and support operations in country.<sup>4</sup>



As depicted above, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and other units by this time had already completed their movement into position, reinforcing the forces which had conducted the war and thereby establishing a larger coalition presence on the ground for OIF-1 than had actually conducted the fight.

A day after Saddam's sons Uday and Qusay were killed in a fierce battle in the northern city of Mosul, the acting Army Chief of Staff, GEN John Keane and the Vice Director for Operations for the Joint Staff, MG Stanley McChrystal, announce the first plan for troop rotations in Iraq. As if a group of detached analysts from the Army Staff or Joint Staff had met in a room to devise the plan, unencumbered by bureaucratic politics and unaffected by personal or organizational biases, GEN Keane announced the policy guidelines driving the first decision:

...we want to provide the combatant commander, General Abizaid, the force he needs to decisively defeat those elements that threaten security in Iraq, and allowing the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to meet its objectives. We want to: instill predictability in the force by developing a force rotation plan with an intended Iraq tour length of up to 12 months. Use active component forces from all services, including support forces, to the extent possible, recognizing the majority of these forces are going to come from the United States Army....Use Reserve volunteers and Reserve component forces not recently mobilized, to balance deployment stress across the force. Craft a rotation plan to balance risk across other potential contingencies. Eliminate or reduce in scope exercises and force commitments that would further stress the force without contributing significantly to the GWOT and OIF. Further seek to internationalize the force. Support the CPA to rapidly develop the police force, Iraqi civil defense force and the new Iraqi army to transition the bulk of security tasks to these forces as quickly as possible. Use contractors, when possible, to provide logistics support, training support and other functions.<sup>5</sup>

It is critical to note that these considerations, essentially the criteria used to arrive at a solution set for OIF-2, do not change with time or circumstance as the process continues. In addition, the process itself, known as a Request for Forces (RFF), is a well defined procedure within the DoD bureaucracy. Potential courses of action are routinely staffed horizontally and vertically (to include OSD) prior to submission to the CJCS for SECDEF approval and subsequent issue of the deployment order.

The plan was to first adjust OIF-1 by redeploying those units which bore the brunt of the fighting during the war—3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force. They were to be replaced in September 2003 by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, with one of its maneuver brigades and a brigade task force and by the Polish Multinational Division, respectively. Thus configured, OIF-1 would remain in place until approximately the February-March timeframe, when OIF-2 units would become operational in country. The initial announcement called for the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division from Europe, with an attached brigade from the Army National Guard, to replace the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division was to be replaced by the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division from Fort Hood, Texas, also with an infantry brigade from the Army National Guard attached. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Cavalry Regiment was to be replaced by a brigade from the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment replaced by the newly equipped Stryker Brigade. The 101<sup>st</sup> Air Assault Division was to be replaced by a multinational division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, in the central corridor in Baghdad, and the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade in the north would redeploy without replacements.

The U.S. contingent would therefore go from 5 Divisions or 17 Brigade equivalents in OIF-1 to 2 Divisions or 8 Brigade equivalents in OIF-2, but there were other important aspects of the announced troop rotation as well. The most notable aspect of the announced troop rotation was the fact that it would be conducted with unit sets, instead of individual replacements, as had been the policy in Vietnam and Korea. Moreover, the rotation for units deploying to the theater will last a year, “12 months boots on the ground”, as opposed to the six month cycle used in previous conflicts. However, despite the year long deployment for the parent divisions, the attached Army National Guard Brigades would only do a six-month rotation. The intent being to alert, mobilize, train and deploy for a six-month rotation and redeploy; the entire deployment—from alert to return to home station—lasting one year. Furthermore, the Guard brigades (or the additional multinational division for that matter) were not yet even designated.

While it would be comforting to think that the decision for OIF-2 rotation was reached by an objective analysis using the criteria enumerated by GEN Keane, to do so would be entirely naïve. In his description of how decisions are reached on national security policy within DoD, former DoD official Chris Jefferies asserts:

...while other policy making models may be relevant to a degree in explaining how policy decisions are made, it is finally the process by which these individuals and groups exercise their influence in competition with other individuals and groups that determines the extent of their influence and thus, the policy itself. That process is bureaucratic politics.<sup>6</sup>

Jefferies goes on to document five axioms of this bureaucratic “game” which show why a simplistic “black box” model (facts go in, they are dispassionately analyzed and an optimized decision is the output) doesn’t fit. While all five apply in this case, it is most instructive to begin with: “No issue is decided once and for all in bureaucratic politics.”<sup>7</sup> To wit, on November 6<sup>th</sup> 2003, LTG Norton A. Schwartz, Director of Operations, Joint Staff, LTG Dick Cody, the Deputy Chief of Staff Operations for the Army, LTG Jan Huly, his counterpart in the Marine Corps, and LTG Steve Blum, the Director of the National Guard Bureau (NGB), held a subsequent press conference to announce a new troop rotation policy for OIF-2. While great pains were made to give the impression of minimal changes and continuity in the decision making process, clearly the “game” was still being played and it was apparent that different players were now involved in the process. As evidence, the only part of the original decision a mere three months earlier which remained constant was that part of the rotation which had already occurred—3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division and 1<sup>st</sup> MEF were gone. The chart below shows the new start point on the ground for the November announcement.<sup>8</sup>



The revised decision envisioned going from now four divisions and 17 brigade equivalents on the ground to three divisions and approximately 13 brigade equivalents--a far cry from the earlier announcement. Elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division,

were named to succeed the 101<sup>st</sup> Air Assault, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Cavalry Regiment. The Stryker Brigade, a brigade from the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Hawaii, and the 39<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 81<sup>st</sup> Enhanced Separate Brigades, all National Guard units, will also deploy in support of OIF-2.

This second announcement begs the question, how could we arrive at so different a conclusion, using the same process with the same organizations and the same NSS? An alternative to the “black box” explanation for the resultant in this policy decision argues that the organizations involved in the process are really the single most important determinants in its outcome. Organizations, especially in DoD, have clear competencies and relatively consistent goals that are strongly influenced by the organization’s culture and further defined by those in authority. After conducting interviews with some of those involved in this process, it is readily apparent that, in part, it resulted in a decision which was a compromise which balanced the competing interests of the organizations with a stake in the outcome.<sup>9</sup> For example, the Combatant Command’s primary stakes were to meet the operational requirements of the commanders in theater and to satisfy the pol-mil expectations in country. In contrast, the Army’s equities included optimizing force OPTEMPO, the potential impact on recruiting and retention and the possibility of using OIF-2 as justification for enlarging the force or at least an increase in total obligation authority. By all accounts, OSD’s agenda was to reduce the size of the force so as to limit the impact of OIF-2 on military transformation, especially since the effort on Iraqi reconstruction would center on the use of civilian contractors. As expected, the NSC was guaranteed to support any plan which provided for a quicker transition to indigenous or multinational forces as a means to reduce the U.S. footprint in country. This was viewed as a means to protect the president from adverse political fallout resulting from the potential for increased casualties during an election year. Like the Army, the NGB was also concerned with OPTEMPO but also had to contend with pressure from state authorities for more predictability while trying to meet the statutory requirements

for activation. Even organizations outside the process were attempting to influence it. Some members of Congress, in reaction to pressure from their constituencies, were attempting to leverage OIF-2 for increased Defense spending (to the benefit of their districts or states) and a military buildup. A quick survey of the underlying institutional equities each entity brings to the decision making process informs outside observers of the conflict inherent in this model. These indications certainly substantiate another of Jefferies' axioms, "all issues in dispute between organizations are more complex and multisided than appear on the surface".<sup>10</sup>

This process was rife with both horizontal (between organizations) as well as vertical (at different levels within an organization) conflict and, as outlined above, the conflict involved many other issues peripheral to the troop rotation 'per se'. Horizontal conflict existed between the services and NGB over whose troops would fulfill the requirements of the RFF.<sup>11</sup> Vertical conflict existed between the more optimistic assessments of the operating environment in country held at OSD and the NSC, versus a more skeptical outlook held in the Combatant Command and the Services.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, to some decision theorists:

Conflict is viewed as a problem that interferes with the accomplishment of purposes. Hierarchical conflict raises the possibility that lower levels will ignore or subvert management directives. Conflict among major partisan groups can undermine effectiveness and the ability of leadership to function. Such dangers are precisely why the structural perspective champions a chain of command. A basic function of authority is to resolve conflict.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, the ultimate "authority" during this process, the SECDEF, was not able to maintain the smaller force structure as allocated in the original OIF-2 announcement which, of course, would have protected the OSD interests. Thus, another model proves inadequate to explain the outcome in this case.

A better framework with which to address the question posed previously lies in bureaucratic politics, a model in which:

...actions relevant to issues are really an agglomeration or collage composed of relatively independent

decisions and actions by individuals and groups of players in various game, as well as formal government decisions and actions that represent a combination of the preferences and relative influence of central players or subsets of players in more specific instances.<sup>14</sup>

Decisions emerge from this process not as analytically optimized solutions sets, but rather from negotiation, compromise, and power positioning among the players. Power is the important variable in this process and it comes from various sources. Power can come from a position with recognized authority; people with special knowledge or expertise have power; the ability to reward others yields power; coercive power resides in those with the ability to obstruct the process or to punish; alliances and networks can enhance power; controlling the agenda is a source of power; subtle power is also possessed by those who frame the problem, set the terms of reference and outline the process; and finally, those with personality, drive and natural leadership abilities have additional power.<sup>15</sup> Power—arising from multiple sources, varying with circumstance, subject matter and time—remains the most prominent and pervasive characteristic of the bureaucratic politics model. The peculiar belief systems (strongly influenced by the culture of the organization which they represent) and the relative power of the players in the process ultimately determine outcomes in this model. Since these antecedents change with time, so will the outcome. Because of the amorphous nature of the model and the tremendous complexity and specificity of the political resultants which emerge, there is dubious merit in attempting to identify or formulate any additional general characteristics; and therefore, the balance of this paper will provide additional examples of how this model applies to the decision for OIF-2.

The players and their relative power were quite different in July, than presently. The Army, while serving as the Office of Primary Responsibility (OPR) for staffing the RFF, was still under an acting Chief at that time, due to the forced retirement of GEN Shinseki. While the Army's intent was to fully support the Combatant Commander's request called the 'base line'—replacing the existing combat units over time without a loss of capability—GEN Keane had already announced his retirement was certainly no longer viewed to be a strong player, especially outside the service.

Therefore, the process was being “inordinately influenced” by an overly optimistic assessment of the conditions on the ground from OSD and the SECDEF. The belief among many in uniform is that this optimism was driven more by the transformation agenda than by the current or future operating environment in Iraq. “Inordinately influenced” because normally the judgments with respect to the nature and composition of the military forces employed in a conflict are left to the senior military leadership. It is important to note that GEN Abizaid was relatively new in his position at that time and it was implied during an interview with a senior member of the Joint Staff that he had not yet built the required alliances and networks to successfully challenge OSD’s assumptions in this process.<sup>16</sup> The Joint Staff was neutral on the rotation policy, leaving it to the Services broker a deal on the troop rotation. Congress was only too happy to see the American footprint reduced and was not yet energized to oppose what was, at that time, an Administration still buoyed by successful wartime efforts. The net effect resulted in Keane’s OIF-2 announcement, describing a much smaller force structure for OIF-2, referred to in the process as ‘base line minus.’

An interesting example on how outcomes reflect the personal preferences of the players is that GEN Keane, despite announcing a “12 month boots on the ground” policy was determined to relieve 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division as soon as possible (although one Brigade served in country for only seven months) and was equally determined for them not to return for a subsequent rotation. As work continued to develop follow on plans and upon seeing elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID on a pre-decisional OIF-3 slide, he literally “blew up” at the AOs. An officer present described it as being “hit so hard by a SABO (an Armor piecing tank munition) round that the fins fell off and struck the innocent bystanders.”<sup>17</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> ID was promptly withdrawn from the briefing. However; with GEN Keane now out of the process, 3<sup>rd</sup> ID is back on the OIF-3 rotation plan.

In preparing for the November announcement, another of Jefferies’ axioms of bureaucratic politics came into play: “the first position on the street has the advantage”.<sup>18</sup> The Joint Staff was still

neutral on the structure of the force package but leaning toward the ‘base line’ due to the now more effective advocacy of GEN Abizaid.<sup>19</sup> The Army, again as OPR staffing the ‘base line’ request, received an important endorsement from the NGB, which although would now have to supply more forces, could effectively do so under the stipulation that they would be activated for a longer (18 month) period. This allows for “12 months boots on the ground” time with their active duty counterparts; but more importantly, it prevents the Reserve components from more rapidly using up all their combat formations in this contingency, thereby providing for more predictability and less turbulence in the force.

Yet, the survivability of the Army plan at this point was still in doubt. A look at the broader implications of the ‘base line’ option, especially in the context of competing contingencies—Sinai MFO, SFOR, KFOR, OEF and Korea—and the fact that despite the NSC’s best intentions to internationalize the force, the bulk of the combat forces would still have to be provided by the U.S. Army. This meant that the OPR’s plan was still a division short in meeting the RFF for OIF-2. The only other entity with the ability to generate a combat formation of that size was the Marine Corps. At first, the Corps hesitated to support the mission because it was so contrary to their service expeditionary culture. The Chairman, however, directed the Commandant of the Marine Corps to support the effort so that a unified uniformed position would be presented to OSD.<sup>20</sup> The Marine Corps agreed to support the Army, but insisted on using their normal expeditionary rotation cycle, which called for two seven month rotations (a month overlap each) to make the 12 month OIF-2 rotation work. In a textbook example of how organizational Standard Operating Procedures can shape outcomes, LTG Hurley, the Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policy and Operations responded to reporter’s questions about the tour length equity issue at the November announcement by stating:

...I'll give you a little background on why we go for seven months. During the mid- to late-1970s, the Marines adopted a six-to-seven month rotation tour policy to meet our commitments globally. All Marines deploy somewhere sooner or later in their enlistment, okay? So to meet that back in the '70s, we determined that it's a good building block of six to seven months to prepare for a deployment. That

allows you some time to train up, to deploy for six or seven months, come -- return to your CONUS base, stand down and then work up for your next deployment. That also fits nicely in a four-year enlistment for a young Marine to come in to make two deployments and have a little bit of extra time in there....So, we adopted that construct many years ago. And could we go for longer? Certainly. But our -- we recruit, we train, we assign to that six-to-seven month deployment. In this case, it's a seven-month deployment that fits our construct nicely.<sup>21</sup>

With this compromise, the Marines bought into the plan, the AOs were assured of accomplishing another of Jefferies' all important axioms, "if you can't get your best position in, then keep your worst position out."<sup>22</sup> The worst position, of course, would have been back to back rotations for some Army units participating in OIF and OEF.

Meanwhile, even actors external to the process were attempting to use the OIF decision to their advantage in furthering peripheral objectives. For years, a cadre of Senators and Congressmen have argued that the military draw down had gone too far and that the military was starting to show the stresses and strains of multiple deployments, especially the Army. Already allowing the Army to operate at 20 thousand over strength, these lawmakers were preparing legislation with the Army to authorize a further 10 thousand man plus up to the Army end strength. A larger force package for OIF-2 would provide added leverage for increasing the size of the Army to meet the additional force requirements levied by a robust OIF-2 plan. An October 15<sup>th</sup> memorandum from the SECDEF to the honorable Ted Stevens, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, argues vehemently against the plus up to end strength and makes transparent the reasons for OSD's position ('base line minus') for OIF-2.<sup>23</sup> The additional manpower costs incurred by the larger OIF-2 force would inevitably impact costly OSD transformation initiatives—all of which call for a smaller military.

In the end, the SECDEF approved the Army position and immediately following the OIF-2 troop rotation announcements by the OPSDEPS in November, he conducted his own press conference with the CJCS to demonstrate publicly his endorsement of the course of action. An expert in bureaucratic politics, he explains to the assembled press that the decision not only provides the capabilities desired by the Commanders on the ground; but also, successfully draws down our footprint in Iraq—his desire

all along. Of course, the decision does modestly draw down the commitment of U.S. combat forces since the end of the war. He just neglects to mention the part about it being a substantial increase in commitment of force since the first OIF-2 announcement in July. And moreover, as an expert practitioner in the bureaucratic politics “game” he is well aware of the relevance of Jefferies’ final assertion: “whose position prevails in decisions can be more important than which position prevails.”<sup>24</sup> By taking credit and assuming responsibility for the announced decision, the SECDEF preserves his reputation and enhances his effectiveness for future decision making because eventually.....refer to Jefferies’ first axiom.

In conclusion, the model/process described above could produce any number of outcomes utilizing the same players, organization, criteria and processes. We should expect a complicated bureaucracy to consider the merits of various positions and arrive at a decision based not on the simple choice of some insulated ‘star chamber’ or the random musing of an institutional potentate; but instead, arrive at a decision based on the relative advantage gained in the process by those who care passionately about what they do--forming networks, compromising and competing in an open market of ideas. Successful outcomes occur by skillfully playing the “game”, in this case the RFF sequence of events. A process where even the rules can be subject to debate and change if the participants so desire, because it is after all, a system of their own creation. Yet, coordination and bargaining will always continue to occur even outside of the process and the specific issue at hand. Laudatory measures are underway to reform the interagency and other bureaucratic processes in government. These efforts should continue to attempt to streamline and simplify our processes, while at the same time, making them more inclusive and objective. However, it would be naïve and self defeating to discount the effects of bureaucratic politics on any government system or process so devised, because as this example demonstrates, they are by definition political in nature.

## END NOTES

1. Phase IV casualties now exceed those occurring prior to the President's announcement of the cessation of major hostilities.

2. The White House, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2002), 1.

3. The White House, 1-2.

4. "Operation Iraqi Freedom," DoD News Briefing, 2003,  
<<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2003/030723-D-6570X-004.jpg>> (23 July 2003).

5. GEN John Keane and MAJ GEN Stanley McChrystal, "Gen. Keane Press Briefing on Plans to Rotate Forces in Iraq," DoD News Transcript, 2003,  
<<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr200330723-04444.html>> (23 July 2003).

6. Chris Jefferies, "Bureaucratic Politics in the Department of Defense: A Practitioner's Perspective," in Bureaucratic Politics and National Security, eds. David C. Lozak and James M. Keagle (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1988), 109.

7. Jefferies, 119.

8. "Operation Iraqi Freedom," DoD News Briefing, 2003,  
<<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Nov2003/031106-D-6570C-002.jpg>> (6 November 2003).

9. The major players, the organizations and their respective interests were discussed in personal interviews with MG Clyde Vaughn, Assistant to the CJCS, LTC Tom Barth, Action Officer G3, LTC Bill Morris, Action Officer and Aide to Army DCSOPS G3, telephonic interview with COL James Barclay, Aide to VCSA, and email interview with COL (P) Mike Oates, Coalition Provision (then assigned to the Joint Staff), at various times during the period

15 December 2003 to 13 Jan 2004. All of these officers were involved in the decision at different stages of the process.

10. Jefferies, 118.

11. Barclay interview.

12. Vaughn interview.

13. Lee G. Bolman and Terrance E. Deal, Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Second Edition, 1997), 172.

14. Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, (New York: Longman, Second Edition, 1999), 296.

15. Bolman, 169-170.

16. Vaughn interview.

17. Barth interview.

18. Jefferies, 114.

19. Vaughn interview.

20. Vaughn interview.

21. "Briefing on the Force Rotation Plan," DoD News Briefing, 2003, <<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20031106-0864.html>> (6 November 2003).

22. Jefferies, 115.

23. Donald Rumsfeld, memorandum to Senator Ted Stevens, 15 October 2003.

24. Jefferies, 116.

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- Keane, GEN John and MAJ GEN Stanley McChrystal. “Gen. Keane Press Briefing on Plans to Rotate Forces in Iraq.” DoD News Transcript. 2003.  
<<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr200330723-04444.html>> (23 July 2003).
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