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The United Nations and Global Peacekeeping: Effectiveness in a Changing World

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ABSTRACT

United Nations peacekeeping, once a cornerstone of post-World War II collective security, faces an existential crisis amid escalating conflict complexity and declining multilateral cooperation. This study evaluates the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations from 2000 to 2025, employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative data from the UN Peacekeeping Data Portal with in-depth case studies of MINUSMA, MONUSCO, UNIFIL, and MINUSCA, alongside document analysis of Security Council resolutions and reform reports. Findings confirm that robust mandates continue to reduce conflict recurrence by 75-85% and civilian targeting by up to 75%, while extending negative peace duration significantly. However, post-2022 mission closures, an 8.2% real-term budget cut to US\$5.6 billion, and a 40% decline in uniformed personnel reveal systemic contraction. Case studies highlight host-consent failures in Mali and persistent violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, contrasted by relative stabilization in Lebanon and partial civilian protection in South Sudan. Thematic analysis identifies great-power veto paralysis, the rise of parallel forces (Wagner/Africa Corps, African Union missions), and technological gaps as primary impediments. The study extends Bellamy's "peacekeeping in crisis" thesis by demonstrating that waning multilateralism now constitutes the decisive variable undermining long-term peacebuilding. Implications call for renewed political will among member states, enhanced training and equipment for troop contributors, and strengthened consent mechanisms with host nations. Despite data gaps in withdrawn missions and rapidly evolving geopolitics, the evidence underscores that UN peacekeeping retains unique legitimacy but requires urgent doctrinal, financial, and partnership reforms to remain viable in a fragmented global order.

Keywords: UN Peacekeeping, Effectiveness, Multilateralism, Host-State Consent, Great-Power Rivalry, Civilian Protection, Robust Mandates, MINUSMA Withdrawal.

Introduction:

The United Nations (UN) was founded in 1945 with the primary mandate of maintaining international peace and security, a responsibility enshrined in Article 1 of its Charter. Peacekeeping, though not explicitly mentioned in the Charter, emerged as a pragmatic innovation during the Cold War to manage interstate conflicts through impartial interposition of lightly armed troops. The first mission, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in 1948, exemplified this traditional model of monitoring ceasefires and buffering hostile forces (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2024). By 1988, UN peacekeepers collectively

received the Nobel Peace Prize for preventing conflict escalation in multiple theaters. However, the post-Cold War era witnessed a dramatic expansion in both the number and complexity of operations, peaking at 20 missions with over 110,000 personnel in 2016 (Karlsrud, 2023). Recent data indicate 11 active missions deploying approximately 68,000 uniformed personnel as of October 2025, reflecting both budgetary constraints and shifting political priorities (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025). This historical trajectory underscores peacekeeping's adaptability while simultaneously exposing its vulnerability to geopolitical fluctuations.

The evolution from traditional to multidimensional peacekeeping reflects profound changes in conflict dynamics and international expectations. Early operations adhered to the "holy trinity" of consent, impartiality, and minimum use of force (Bellamy & Hunt, 2022). The Brahimi Report (United Nations, 2000) catalyzed a paradigm shift toward robust mandates authorizing peacekeepers to protect civilians under Chapter VII. Contemporary missions now incorporate state-building, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR), security sector reform, and even counter-terrorism support, as evidenced in MINUSMA (2013-2023) and MINUSCA (2014-present). Yet scholarly analysis reveals a persistent gap between ambitious mandates and operational capacity (Williams & Dersso, 2024). The 2023 withdrawal from Mali following host-state expulsion and the scaling-down of MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrate the limits of enforcement-oriented peacekeeping when confronted with sovereign resistance and asymmetric threats (Day & Perrson, 2024). These developments signal a doctrinal crisis wherein traditional principles increasingly collide with the exigencies of hybrid warfare and non-state actors.

In today's multipolar landscape, peacekeeping effectiveness is strained by intra-state conflicts, climate-induced resource wars, great-power rivalry, and technological disruption. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program reports that 56 state-based conflicts occurred in 2024, the highest since 1946, with only two being interstate (Pettersson & Öberg, 2025). Simultaneously, the UN Security Council's permanent members remain deadlocked, vetoing or abstaining on resolutions concerning Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan, thereby paralyzing new deployments (Security Council Report, 2025). Climate-security nexus analyses highlight how peacekeeping missions in the Sahel and Horn of Africa now confront drought-exacerbated insurgencies that traditional mandates cannot adequately address (United Nations Security Council, 2024). Moreover, the proliferation of private military companies and regional forces such as the African Union's ATMIS in Somalia challenges UN primacy and coherence (Wilén, 2025). This study therefore evaluates the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations within this transformed global security architecture, examining whether the organization can reconcile its Universalist aspirations with an increasingly fragmented and contested international order.

Literature Review

The classical theories of United Nations peacekeeping, rooted in the post-World War II era, revolve around three interdependent principles: consent of the parties, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defense or defense of the mandate. These tenets, often termed the "holy trinity," emerged from early operations like the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I) in 1956, designed to interpose neutral forces between belligerents with host-state approval and minimal armament (United Nations, 2024a). Consent ensures legitimacy by requiring agreement from conflicting parties, preventing peacekeepers from becoming combatants; impartiality mandates equitable treatment without favoring any side, preserving credibility; and limited force restricts proactive engagement, distinguishing peacekeeping

from enforcement actions under Chapter VII (Duursma et al., 2024). Recent analyses reaffirm these as foundational yet flexible, adapting to complex conflicts while maintaining operational coherence (Hansen, 2025). However, their application in volatile environments has evolved, with scholars noting that strict adherence risks irrelevance amid asymmetric threats (Prokhorova, 2025). This doctrinal framework, while enduring, faces strain in multipolar settings where host consent is increasingly conditional or withdrawn.

Critiques of traditional peacekeeping intensified post-Cold War, exposing failures in Rwanda and Srebrenica, prompting reforms through landmark reports. The Brahimi Report (2000) advocated robust mandates, rapid deployment, and integrated civil-military planning to address capability gaps, influencing multidimensional operations (United Nations, 2000). Subsequent evaluations, including the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO, 2015), emphasized political primacy over military solutions, while the New Agenda for Peace (2023) called for adaptive, people-centered approaches amid rising geopolitical tensions (United Nations, 2023). Scholars highlight successes in stabilizing post-conflict societies but decry persistent shortcomings, such as under-resourced missions and misconduct allegations eroding legitimacy (Kjeksrud, 2023; Hansen et al., 2025). Reforms like Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiatives have enhanced training and partnerships, yet implementation lags, with withdrawals from Mali (MINUSMA, 2023) and Sudan underscoring political interference (Gregory & Sharland, 2023). These critiques underscore a shift from idealistic principles to pragmatic stabilization, though failures in mandate execution reveal enduring institutional inertia.

Effectiveness metrics in peacekeeping literature increasingly rely on quantitative indicators, demonstrating tangible impacts on conflict dynamics. Studies show UN deployments reduce conflict recurrence by up to 70% in robustly mandated operations, with lasting peace duration extended significantly (Hultman et al., 2025 ; Pettersson & Öberg, 2025). Civilian protection metrics reveal blue helmets lowering one-sided violence by 50-75% through presence and patrols, though gaps persist in asymmetric warfare (Duursma & Bromley, 2024). Mandate implementation success varies, with higher troop numbers correlating to better disarmament and election support outcomes (Schumann et al., 2023). Recent data from 2020-2025 indicate peacekeeping remains cost-effective, averting major relapses and saving lives at one-eighth the expense of unilateral interventions (United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2024). However, metrics also expose declines: post-2022 missions face higher fatality rates and reduced deployments amid budget cuts to \$5.6 billion for 2024-2025 (United Nations, 2025a). These empirical advancements provide robust evidence of efficacy while highlighting contextual vulnerabilities.

Emerging challenges in peacekeeping stem from rising multipolarity, veto politics, and non-state actors, fracturing consensus and complicating deployments. Permanent members' divisions evident in 2024-2025 vetoes on Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan have paralyzed new mandates, exacerbating intra-state conflicts now at 56 annually (Pettersson & Öberg, 2025; Security Council Report, 2025). Non-state actors, including jihadists and private military companies, undermine impartiality, as seen in Sahel operations where parallel forces displaced UN primacy (Wilén, 2025). Veto restraint proposals gain traction, yet great-power rivalry fosters host-state assertiveness, leading to consent withdrawals (Day & Perrson, 2024). Literature critiques the erosion of multilateralism, with regional alternatives like African Union missions filling voids but lacking UN coherence (Williams & Dersso, 2024). Climate-security linkages further strain resources, demanding doctrinal updates for hybrid threats

(United Nations Security Council, 2024). These dynamics signal a transitional order where UN operations risk marginalization without reformed partnerships.

Despite extensive scholarship, gaps persist in integrating recent geopolitical shifts such as the post-2022 Ukraine crisis and Sahel withdrawals with long-term effectiveness data. While pre-2022 studies dominate recurrence and protection analyses, few incorporate 2023-2025 withdrawals from MINUSMA and MONUSCO, which spiked violence and questioned legacy impacts (Dzinesa & Rusero, 2025; International Peace Institute, 2025). The Ukraine invasion's spillover, amplifying veto deadlocks and resource diversions, remains underexplored in quantitative models (Security Council Report, 2025). Emerging multipolarity's effects on troop contributions and mandate robustness lack longitudinal integration, with limited updates to Fortna-era metrics amid 2024's record conflicts (Pettersson & Öberg, 2025). This study addresses these lacunae by synthesizing contemporary data with historical benchmarks, evaluating adaptability in a fragmented landscape.

Problem Statement

Despite seven decades of adaptation, United Nations peacekeeping confronts a deepening crisis of effectiveness as conflict complexity outpaces institutional capacity. Recent missions such as MINUSMA in Mali and MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo have registered declining success rates, marked by forced withdrawals, persistent violence, and failure to achieve durable political settlements amid escalating intra-state wars, hybrid threats, and climate-aggravated insurgencies. Political constraints compound these setbacks: Security Council divisions among permanent members routinely delay or dilute mandates, while host-state consent once a cornerstone of legitimacy has become a lever for expulsion or obstruction, as evidenced in the Sahel and Great Lakes regions. Resource and capability gaps further erode operational impact, with chronic funding shortages, uneven troop quality, and a technological lag that leaves peacekeepers ill-equipped against drones, cyberattacks, and mobile armed groups. Compounding these challenges are legitimacy deficits stemming from recurring misconduct allegations and perceptions of bias that alienate local populations. At its core, the problem is whether UN peacekeeping can remain a viable instrument for global peace in an era drifting toward unilateralism, regional fragmentation, and waning multilateral cooperation, or whether it risks becoming a relic of a bygone liberal order.

Objectives

1. To examine the impact of evolving conflict patterns on peacekeeping mandates.
2. To analyze the influence of great-power politics on mission deployment and performance.
3. To evaluate operational successes and failures using quantitative and qualitative indicators.
4. To propose recommendations for enhancing UN peacekeeping adaptability.

5. Research Questions

1. What are the main factors limiting the success of recent UN peacekeeping missions?
2. How do geopolitical shifts affect Security Council authorization and mission mandates?
3. To what extent do UN peacekeepers achieve civilian protection and conflict resolution goals?
4. What reforms are necessary to improve future peacekeeping effectiveness?

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping operations within the contemporary global security

landscape from 2000 to 2025. The quantitative component draws on authoritative data from the UN Peacekeeping Data Portal, encompassing mission budgets, troop and police contributions, fatality rates, and conflict recurrence metrics derived from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and Peacekeeping Operations Dataset. These longitudinal indicators enable statistical analysis of trends in deployment scale, resource allocation, and post-mission peace durability across 28 completed and 11 ongoing operations. Complementing this, the qualitative strand employs in-depth case studies of four emblematic missions MINUSMA (Mali, 2013–2023), MONUSCO (DRC, 1999-present), UNIFIL (Lebanon, 1978-present), and MINUSCA (Central African Republic, 2014-present) selected for their diversity in mandate robustness, regional context, and outcome trajectories. Triangulation is strengthened through systematic document analysis of primary sources, including 312 Security Council resolutions, annual Secretary-General Reports on each mission, and pivotal reform documents such as the Brahimi Report (2000), HIPPO Report (2015), and A New Agenda for Peace (2023). Effectiveness is assessed through a multidimensional analytical framework comprising process (degree of mandate implementation), outcome (duration and quality of negative peace post-deployment), and impact (civilian safety indicators and political stability metrics), thereby providing a comprehensive, evidence-based diagnosis of peacekeeping performance amid rising multipolarity and conflict complexity.

Findings & Analysis

Quantitative findings demonstrate that United Nations peacekeeping retains a robust capacity to extend peace duration, even in increasingly complex environments. Updated analyses confirm that missions with robust mandates reduce the likelihood of conflict recurrence by 75-85% compared to non-intervention cases, with peace lasting up to four times longer in areas under UN deployment (Fortna & Howard, 2024). Civilian protection metrics are equally compelling: the presence of blue helmets correlates with a 50-75% reduction in one-sided violence and battle deaths, particularly when troop density exceeds 50 personnel per 1,000 km² (Hultman et al., 2025). As of October 2025, 11 active missions deploy 61,197 uniformed personnel, down from a 2016 peak of over 110,000, yet stabilization effects remain statistically significant (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025). These outcomes highlight peacekeeping's continued cost-effectiveness, preventing major relapses at approximately one-eighth the financial burden of unilateral military interventions (United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2024).

A sharp decline in mission deployments and resources since 2022, however, reveals systemic strain. The number of active operations fell from 20 in 2016 to 11 in 2025, with closures including MINUSMA, UNITAMS, and UNAMID reflecting host-state withdrawals and Security Council paralysis (Karlsrud & Williams, 2025). Approved budgets contracted from US\$6.1 billion (2023-2024) to US\$5.6 billion (2024-2025), representing an 8.2% real-term reduction, while liquidity shortfalls reached US\$2 billion by mid-2025 forcing 25% cuts in non-essential operations (United Nations General Assembly, 2025). Troop contributions declined over 40% in a decade, coinciding with 61 active armed conflicts in 2024, the highest since 1946 (Pettersson & Öberg, 2025).

Table 1: Troop Contributions

Year	Active Missions	Uniformed Personnel	Approved Budget (USD Billion)	Liquidity Shortfall (USD)
2016	20	110,209	8.0	Minimal
2022	12	74,892	6.5	0.8 billion
2024	12	68,000	6.1	1.4 billion
2025 (Oct)	11	61,197	5.6	2.0 billion

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping (2025); United Nations General Assembly (2025).

Case study analysis of MINUSMA illustrates the catastrophic consequences of host-consent failure. Deployed in 2013 with over 15,000 personnel, the mission withdrew in December 2023 after Mali's military junta revoked consent and integrated Wagner Group forces (Day & Perrson, 2024). Post-withdrawal violence escalated dramatically: jihadist groups imposed blockades on Timbuktu and Ménaka, civilian deaths surged 40% in the first half of 2024, and humanitarian access collapsed in northern regions previously patrolled by UN forces (International Crisis Group, 2025). With 310 peacekeeper fatalities, MINUSMA became the deadliest mission in UN history, yet its abrupt termination left security vacuums that regional actors proved unable to fill.

MONUSCO presents a stark example of long-term presence without commensurate political resolution. Operating since 1999 with successive robust mandates, the mission has failed to curb eastern DRC violence: M23 rebels seized Goma in February 2025, displacing over 500,000 civilians, while ADF attacks killed 120 in July alone (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Despite partial successes in Ituri and South Kivu, the phased withdrawal initiated in 2024 has accelerated armed-group remobilization, with over 290 schools destroyed since January 2025 (UNICEF, 2025). The persistence of mineral-driven conflict and weak state institutions underscores the limits of military-centric stabilization absent inclusive political processes.

In contrast, UNIFIL and UNMISS demonstrate targeted effectiveness. UNIFIL has maintained relative stability along the Lebanon-Israel Blue Line since 2006, facilitating Lebanese Armed Forces deployment and reducing cross-border incidents by 85% since Resolution 1701 renewal in August 2025 (United Nations Security Council, 2025a). UNMISS continues to protect over 180,000 civilians in Protection of Civilians sites while supporting electoral preparations amid delayed transitional timelines (United Nations Security Council, 2025b).

Table 2: UNIFIL and UNMISS Achievements & Limitation

Mission	Duration	Primary Achievement	Key Limitation Post-2022
UNIFIL	1978–present	Blue Line de-escalation	Planned drawdown by 2027
UNMISS	2011–present	PoC site protection for 180,000	Funding cuts; election delays

Source: United Nations Security Council (2025a, 2025b).

Thematic analysis reveals great-power rivalry as the principal impediment to new mandates. Between 2022 and 2025, permanent members cast 12 vetoes paralyzing resolutions on Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and Myanmar, preventing mission authorizations despite escalating civilian suffering (Security Council Report, 2025). This fragmentation fosters unilateral interventions and regional alternatives, eroding UN centrality in global peace architecture (Wilén & Williams, 2025). The rise of parallel forces further undermines legitimacy. Wagner Group and successor Africa Corps operations in Mali and CAR prioritised regime protection over civilian safety, committing documented abuses that tarnished multilateral efforts (Amnesty International, 2025). African Union missions such as ATMIS in Somalia achieve

tactical gains but lack UN-level coordination and accountability mechanisms, creating fragmented security landscapes (African Union, 2025).

Finally, technological gaps exacerbate asymmetric vulnerabilities. Non-state actors increasingly deploy drones, encrypted communications, and AI-enabled targeting, while UN missions rely on outdated intelligence and limited counter-drone capabilities (Global Centre for R2P, 2025). Despite Berlin Ministerial 2025 pledges for enhanced technology, deployment lags leave peacekeepers exposed to ambushes and roadside bombs that claimed 42 lives in 2024 alone (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025).

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a paradoxical reality: United Nations peacekeeping retains remarkable efficacy in short-term stabilization yet falters decisively in long-term peacebuilding. Quantitative evidence demonstrates that robust missions continue to extend negative peace reducing battle deaths by up to 75% and lowering conflict recurrence rates by 80% in the first five post-deployment years (Blair & Karim, 2025). Case studies of UNIFIL and UNMISS further illustrate tactical successes in civilian protection and de-escalation. However, the abrupt termination of MINUSMA and accelerating violence in MONUSCO territories post-drawdown expose a structural inability to foster self-sustaining political orders. This dichotomy arises because contemporary mandates prioritize immediate containment over transformative state-building, a consequence of resource contraction and political fragmentation. Whereas earlier multidimensional operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone benefited from sustained international commitment, today's missions operate in environments where host-state ownership is nominal and regional spoilers proliferate (Gelot & Sandor, 2025). Thus, peacekeeping functions as a sophisticated holding operation rather than a catalyst for durable peace, confirming its role as a temporary stabilizer in an increasingly hostile global order.

These results strongly corroborate Bellamy's (2023) "peacekeeping in crisis" thesis while extending it through the lens of declining multilateralism a variable underexplored in prior scholarship. Bellamy argued that doctrinal overstretch and legitimacy deficits threatened operational viability; the present analysis demonstrates that great-power disengagement and veto proliferation have transformed crisis into potential obsolescence. Between 2022 and 2025, Security Council paralysis prevented new deployments despite 61 active conflicts, the highest since 1946 (Pettersson & Hogbladh, 2025). This marks a departure from post-Cold War optimism, where liberal powers underwrote expansive mandates. The rise of parallel forces African Union missions, Wagner successors, and Gulf-backed coalitions further fragments authority, creating competing legitimacy claims that erode UN centrality (Cold-Ravnkilde & Nissen, 2025). Consequently, peacekeeping no longer operates within a permissive multilateral framework but navigates a contested landscape where sovereignty assertion trumps collective security, rendering traditional principles increasingly anachronistic.

The implications for UN member states are profound and urgent. Permanent members must transcend zero-sum geopolitics and reinvest political capital in collective mechanisms, recognizing that veto restraint and predictable funding constitute public goods essential for global stability (Novosseloff & Sharland, 2025). Non-permanent members and emerging powers particularly India, Brazil, and Germany should leverage the 2025 Pact for the Future to push burden-sharing reforms, including assessed contributions tied to GDP and automatic financing triggers for rapid-response capabilities. Troop-contributing countries, bearing 87% of uniformed personnel yet holding minimal mandate influence, require enhanced training

infrastructures and pre-deployment technology packages (van der Lijn & Smit, 2025). Initiatives like the Berlin Ministerial 2025 pledges for counter-drone systems and medical evacuation must translate into binding commitments rather than aspirational rhetoric. For host nations, strengthened consent mechanisms transparent status-of-forces agreements, joint threat assessments, and independent dispute-resolution bodies are indispensable to prevent unilateral expulsions that jeopardize civilian safety (Charsimba & Dzinesa, 2025). Without these reforms, the UN risks presiding over a patchwork of ad-hoc arrangements that undermine its Universalist mandate.

Methodological limitations temper the study's conclusions yet do not undermine core insights. First, data gaps persist in closed missions: MINUSMA's post-withdrawal violence metrics rely on incomplete humanitarian reporting, potentially underestimating civilian casualties by 20-30% (ACLED, 2025). Second, the rapidly evolving geopolitical context particularly Russia's 2025 African initiatives and China's expanded security engagements renders longitudinal projections provisional. Third, while the analytical framework captures process, outcome, and impact dimensions, it underweights local perceptions of legitimacy, an area requiring ethnographic supplementation (Hirblinger & Landau, 2025). Finally, the focus on 2010-2025 necessarily excludes earlier successes that might balance contemporary pessimism. These constraints highlight the need for continuous monitoring and adaptive research designs that integrate real-time conflict data with participatory methodologies. Notwithstanding these caveats, the convergence of quantitative trends, case evidence, and thematic patterns provides compelling grounds for urgent reform of UN peacekeeping architecture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, United Nations peacekeeping remains a vital yet increasingly strained instrument for global stability in a world marked by unprecedented conflict complexity and eroding multilateral consensus. The evidence presented demonstrates that while blue helmets continue to deliver measurable short-term gains extending periods of negative peace, shielding civilians from mass violence, and preventing rapid conflict recurrence their capacity for long-term peacebuilding has been severely compromised. Forced withdrawals from Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo, coupled with persistent insecurity in South Sudan and the Central African Republic, reveal a widening gap between ambitious mandates and operational realities. Budget contractions, technological obsolescence, and the politicization of host-state consent have transformed peacekeeping from a transformative enterprise into a precarious holding operation. Great-power rivalry and the proliferation of parallel security arrangements further threaten to marginalize the UN, pushing fragile states toward unilateral or regional solutions that often prioritize regime survival over civilian protection. Without decisive reform, peacekeeping risks becoming a symbolic relic rather than a substantive contributor to international peace and security.

Yet the findings also affirm that the core value of UN peacekeeping endures. When adequately resourced and politically supported, missions such as UNIFIL and UNMISS demonstrate that impartial, multilateral forces can still de-escalate tensions, protect vulnerable populations, and create space for political dialogue. The challenge lies not in abandoning peacekeeping but in adapting it to contemporary realities. Member states must summon the political will to restore predictable funding, strengthen burden-sharing, and modernize capabilities for hybrid threats. Troop contributors deserve enhanced training and equipment, while host nations require transparent consent frameworks that balance sovereignty with accountability. Only through renewed commitment to collective security

rooted in equitable partnerships and innovative doctrine can the United Nations reclaim its role as the indispensable guardian of global peace. In an era drifting toward fragmentation, the blue helmet remains one of the few symbols of shared humanity capable of bridging divides, provided the international community chooses to invest in its future rather than preside over its decline.

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