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Civil Military Cooperation and Security Sector Reform in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies

David Last



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This CSG Paper analyzes the nature of civil military relations and describes how they affect civil military cooperation and civil affairs in complex humanitarian emergencies. Understanding these relationships helps professionals to improve security sectors through practice and develop more effective security sector reform programming.

Civil military relations at the highest level affect civil military cooperation in emergency operations at home and abroad. If military and police leaders understand the “political marketplace” within which these relationships occur, they can use the stress of operations to reinforce respect for democratic governance, rule of law, and responsibility to civil authority. A generic map of security, governance, economy, and society is sketched, which can be applied to identify actors and their impact on other sectors. Building trusted and effective networks for cooperative action is central; forces unable to do that effectively at home may do harm abroad.

INTRODUCTION

In January 2014, Canada supported a senior officers' course on civil military relations and civil military cooperation at the Peace Support Training Centre in Sentul, Indonesia. It was attended by military officers and civilian experts from a dozen countries, and focused on regional responses to humanitarian disasters. Two Nepali lieutenant colonels participated. When an earthquake struck Nepal in April 2015, one officer was near Kathmandu and has been engaged in the relief effort since. The other was in Lebanon, commanding the Nepali battalion in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. Civil military cooperation is an essential part of military and police operations, and both are conducted in an international environment. Improving the capacity of military and police forces to conduct operations such as these is central to the objectives of security sector reform (SSR) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2008: 20–23). As with any practical activity, doing it can help us to improve, or it can ingrain bad habits. Getting civil military cooperation right at home helps us to get it right when we deploy. Doing it right when we are deployed helps us to inculcate the right habits for effective security sectors, particularly in transitional countries.

Effective security sectors are trusted and efficient networks, capable of dealing with security problems that arise at home or abroad, to the satisfaction of governments, societies and, of course, the professional security forces themselves. They protect the interests of people, not just elites or governments; they respect rule of law, even in the chaos of war and disaster; they are subordinate to civilian authority, even when soldiers think they know best; they are effective – inspiring trust and confidence through competence and transparency, eschewing corruption and abuse of power; and they are engaged with, and supported by, the civilian communities in which they operate (Sedra, 2010). These are not easy objectives. Criticism of SSR centres on its failure to deliver military and police forces that provide basic security, much less meet these standards (Short, 2010: 11, 13, 22, 26.).

In this paper, I discuss the nature of civil military relations and describe how they affect civil military cooperation (CIMIC) and civil affairs (CA) in complex humanitarian emergencies. Understanding these relationships helps professionals to improve security sectors through practice: democratic governance, rule of law and respect for civil authority can come to life in operations, or they can be bypassed in the name of expedience. My argument is that understanding the “political marketplace” within which these relations occur helps practitioners to understand how civil military relations shape the strategic environment within which operations are conducted. Glen Milne (2004) calls it a political marketplace, because goods and services, and power and favours, are traded over time on the basis of trust and relationships – just as they are in consumer marketplaces. I am writing for the majority countries – not the small number of big powers, but the

large number of smaller states, which cannot always dictate the conditions under which they will engage. Like small companies, small states must be agile, and understand the relationships that shape decisions, at home and abroad.

BACKGROUND: WHAT ARE CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS?

Civil military relations are characterized by a series of questions, which every society has to answer for itself. What is the relationship between civilians and the military? Between the people without weapons, and organizations with weapons, which are established as separate armed bodies to protect society? How can a society maintain a military that sustains and protects democratic values? What are the political mechanisms that control the use of military and police forces? What influence do different political constituencies (such as political parties or ethnic groups) have over the instruments of force? Where does the security budget come from, and with what strings attached? What political values justify the use of force? Is the electorate engaged to ensure political oversight, and what are the consequences for a party or leader seen to misuse force (Burk, 2002). If a population is divided by language, religion or ethnicity, then all civil military relations are overshadowed by the possibility that one group will come to dominate another through force of arms. These questions are fundamental to SSR.

The nature of civil military relations within a state will affect the behaviour of a military force when it deploys, whether at home or abroad. Relations will also affect the resources that are available, and the balance of police, paramilitary and military responsibilities commanders assume. An example of this is the deployment of Brazilian troops to Haiti, where infantry battalions assumed responsibilities for security in urban areas like Port au Prince. The skills that they used included many learned from state-level military police. In turn, the skills used by the military police to bring favelas under control in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo were informed by the military experience in Haiti.¹ The experiences of individuals and practices over time, as well as traditions that go back for generations, all help to create the expectations and patterns of behaviour that permit cooperation, not only for the military and police, but also for civilians and politicians in their interactions with security forces and leaders. These relationships and expectations cannot be changed quickly, so it is important to be aware of them and their impact on operations.

The political context of both requesting and providing nations will determine which agencies and departments will be involved. The cast of characters may change, and it may be disputed by strong personalities or in response to public pressure. Domestic law will constrain the use of domestic and international forces, but will also affect financing, contracts, work visas, entry and import of materials, and duties paid on imported materials, even in an emergency. Both international humanitarian law and law of armed

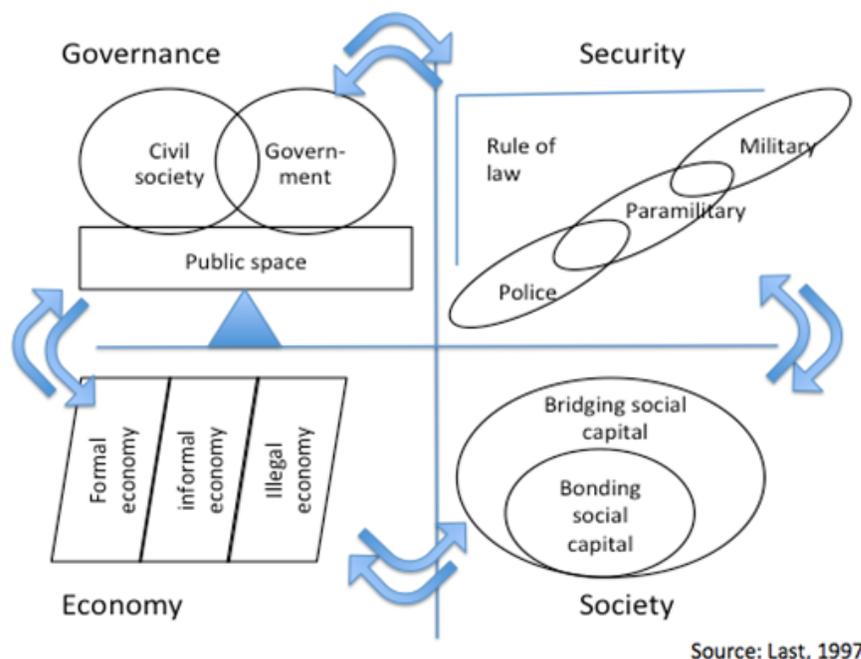
conflict may have a bearing on forces operating in a complex emergency, where troops may be forced to defend themselves or exercise force to achieve their mission. Notwithstanding laws, protocols, agreements and best practices, once units deploy to remote areas with disrupted communications, direct oversight is likely to be impossible, so trust is an essential part of any operation.

Mutual trust is the most important element of civil military relations. It is trust that allows civilians and civilian leaders to work with armed units who have the capacity to harm them. It is also trust that permits armed units from different countries to collaborate in stressful and often dangerous conditions. The military context will shape interoperability. Who do armed forces practise working with, and who are their real or notional enemies? What scenarios do staff college exercises rehearse? Doctrine is the common “software” that allows organizations to function together. Is it clear and appropriate for the scale of operation? Some countries import doctrine and concepts wholesale from larger countries, and officers find themselves imagining units and capabilities that they do not possess, and improvising to fulfil functions more appropriate to much larger forces, rather than relying on civilian partners.

Civil military relations describe a political relationship. They shape, and are shaped by, the context within which operations at home and abroad are conceived and mounted, and they help to determine the missions that are selected for, not by, the military commander. CIMIC or CA, on the other hand, are the tactics, techniques and procedures that are used by military forces to support a commander’s mission (Hangya 2014, 5-6).

There is a spectrum of “acceptable dominance” by military commanders in operations. Are military commanders driving events – are they navigating – or are they passengers in the back seat, just there to provide trucks and sandbags? Military commanders may not be given clear mandates or missions. Generally, the more violent or kinetic a mission, and the bigger a deployed military force, the more likely it is that a military commander will be expected to take the lead and drive events. But there is no guarantee that a military commander is a good driver, or knows where he/she is going.

Most senior officers will be familiar with the concept of a triangular relationship between government, armed forces and society. Society supports a government that meets its needs. One way that governments do so is to provide protection by establishing armed forces; in turn, armed forces are sometimes called upon to maintain order in society, and sometimes to protect society from external threats. But this model does not give us enough detail to understand civil military relations. We can expand it to a more universal model that encompasses security, governance, economy and society. This model will help senior officers who are trying to understand the political, economic, social and informational aspects of their profession.² The model is illustrated in Figure 1. (p.9)

Figure 1: Environment for Civil Military Relations

We begin with the concept of security. All societies deploy a range of security forces with different mandates. They may range from the unarmed police to large and well-equipped military units. All these forces operate according to rules, which are established by some form of government. Usually the government controls military and police forces through a framework of law and budgetary measures.

Moving to the second quadrant, governance consists of the act of steering or leading. All governing structures, from a traditional village to a superpower, include four basic functions of government: the executive (decision making and agenda setting); legislative (rulemaking); judicial (adjudicating); and administrative (managing) functions. But government cannot control all the voices in a society. The voices outside government, including all the organizations that try to organize, bring together and articulate interests, can be labelled “civil society.” In democracies, civil society gives rise to political parties, which compete to take control of government. They do so by acting in public space, using mass meetings, mass media, organization and political action. The “fulcrum” that permits this is political infrastructure – telecommunications networks, and software like constitutions, privacy laws and human rights, which can tilt the balance of public space toward or away from governments in power.

The security sector, narrowly construed, is sometimes described as the uniformed services in the first quadrant, but it is more common to include the governance, oversight and

legal institutions implied by the second quadrant, and the practical problems of SSR make it clear that the other two quadrants cannot be omitted. The arrows in Figure 1 are only emblematic of the hundreds of connections that link each function.

Governments need money to pay for civil servants, infrastructure and the salaries of security forces, and this comes from taxes, which are only levied in the formal economy. The informal market is important for livelihoods (family units, for example, operate mainly in the grey economy), but this does not offer much material support to government. Outside family ties, the grey economy might force people to rely on informal security, such as gangs and crime bosses, instead of police. In the black market, illegal activities – guns, drugs, smuggling and prostitution – can undermine public confidence in law and order and support parallel power structures, particularly if military or police leaders are involved in them.

In the final quadrant, we see a representation of society.³ Social capital is the network of trusted relationships that surround an individual. Bonding capital is like the superglue that holds families and small groups together, on which they fall back in difficult times. Bridging capital is the social lubrication that allows people to trust others they have never met. Paper currency and stock markets are good examples of the importance of bridging social capital. Society needs both types of trust to function well. This brings us back to security and governance. If the public face of the police or military is associated with a hostile group, then the excluded groups may fall back on informal economies and their own group networks, with consequences for governance and security, particularly in the disruption of a complex emergency.

When a “government” makes a decision, it is really made by individuals. The system affects the individuals who make the decision, and the decisions they make affect the evolution of the system over time.⁴ Every government system is a consequence of its starting point and its historical experiences, so domestic and international crises play an important role in shaping the relationships of security forces to the laws and mechanisms that govern them. Security sectors learn how to behave by handling crises, and they learn from the international military and civilian presence that helps to manage the crisis.⁵

Consider a protracted domestic crisis like the one affecting Sierra Leone from 1990 to 2000. The crisis destroyed the capacity to govern and disrupted the economy; families were broken up, and people did not trust strangers. They turned to the informal economy to survive. Tax revenues dropped and international credit dried up. Security forces were not paid, and they turned to freelance banditry to raise their own cash. Now consider a situation in which the military dominates government, effectively “ruling” (making the rules, distributing economic benefits to themselves) without actually governing. When the formal economy and government do not work well, the politicians are blamed, and the generals behind the scene are insulated from the discontent, but their power is mobilized

to repress the dissent in the name of the government. This is one way to interpret what has been going on in transitional countries such as Egypt, Algeria and even Turkey, although each case is different (Cook, 2007). In each of these examples, the relationship between those with weapons and those without has become dysfunctional. In Egypt weak and divided security forces became predatory; in Algeria strong and effective security forces dominate government without permitting adequate expression of economic and social aspirations.

There is more than one way to organize relations between a government, its society and its security forces. Effective relationships provide for the normal subordination of military and police forces to civilian government, sometimes with exceptions for crises (Ackerman, 1997). This is even true in one-party states, sometimes with the added safeguard of political officers deployed down to unit level. This negates any political neutrality, but can also serve to keep the military out of internal party disputes, and this can be a stabilizing force in a one-party state.⁶ Under some constitutions, the armed forces are established as guardians, with a responsibility to intervene if the constitution is threatened.⁷

Despite the variety, there are at least four universal elements that contribute to stable and effective relations between government, society and security forces. The state preserves a monopoly of violence. There is some institutional separation to constrain security forces, usually in the form of legislation combined with budgetary authority (armies do not make their own laws or sign their own paycheques). The security leaders are in broad agreement with political leaders about key issues. Finally, society accepts the arrangements as legitimate. Domestic and international crises can test these arrangements.⁸

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS?

Civil military relations have fundamental consequences for state responses to domestic and international crises. Who is in charge? Is authority unitary, or is it constitutionally divided to prevent misuse of military and police powers? Some forces deploy with the habit of command, while others expect to negotiate and share responsibilities. When they deploy in unfamiliar circumstances, they may encounter resistance or incomprehension – “You are not my boss! Who put you in charge?” – and even when there is great clarity in law, those responding to a crisis may not have read it.

A second vital issue is where the money comes from, and who has to approve it. What mechanisms exist for accountability? The larger framework of law is important. Constitutions may set constraints, but their interpretation will be a matter for experts. Federal systems divide responsibilities between levels of government, and crises or declarations of emergency may affect this normal division of responsibilities, and the flow of funds. Common law and common practice may enable quick response – we know how

to manage because we have done it before – but they may equally be sources of dispute and confusion in the face of unprecedented situations. Delays will almost inevitably result, and responders will be judged on the ways that they manage these delays.

A third important consideration is flexibility within the framework of law. Are relationships fixed or malleable? This can be as much a matter of political and legal culture and practice as constitutions or fiats. Above all, who has the capacity to demonstrate flexibility at the local level? This may be as simple as seeking forgiveness after an action rather than permission beforehand, but it can make a big difference in moving an operation forward against procedural or legal barriers intended for more normal circumstances.

All of a state's interactions with its neighbours and with international organizations are opportunities to shape the environment within which the state, the government of the day and its security forces pursue their objectives. States invest diplomatic, military, information and economic resources to shape their environments. Civil military relations affect the way that security forces will be used in these interactions. The first meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) defence ministers was held in 2010; months of discussions between ministers and their chiefs of defence preceded the summit to determine what would be discussed and the aims to be pursued. When forces are offered to an international mission, will they be offered bilaterally, or through a regional or a multilateral organization? Will training and education courses and staff exchanges be used to improve relations between neighbours? It is possible for governments to seek closer relations, while senior officers see dangers and drag their heels, creating tensions between civil and military leaders. With the right information campaign, international deployments, exchanges and training can enhance the reputation and social capital of military leaders at home, while serving political aims abroad.

NATURAL DISASTERS AT HOME

In every state, the military represents the force of last resort, but it is also a reservoir of trained and equipped personnel, usually available at short notice for contingencies. Although the labels may vary, most states prepare for contingency operations at home, which fall along a continuum from the low end of non-kinetic (no violence involved) to high-end kinetic operations (when there is a risk or probability of violence). At the low end, armed forces may provide specialist services and trained personnel to manage emergency situations, or support civilian authorities who are doing so. Soldiers may even deploy without weapons if there is no risk. In other cases, they will be lightly armed to protect assets or deter pilfering. The relationship with the local population is important. If local police refuse to go into an area this might be an indication that there are problems with

the response to government authority, and moving troops in or through the area may be dangerous. On the other hand, the effort to help the population may reinforce perceptions of government legitimacy. Disasters are stressful times, and it is easy to blame distant governments, so every action is a public relations exercise.

Political constituencies may seek to take advantage of this, thus civil military cooperation has an impact on civil military relations.

Moving up the scale to more kinetic operations, we find “aid to the civil power” or internal security operations. The main purpose of this sort of operation is to reinforce the authority of the government, but to do so in a way that improves peace and order. This implies legitimacy of the entire enterprise; arbitrary force is likely to undermine legitimacy, while restrained power may enhance it. In countries with effective security sectors, police will often take the lead, while military forces are held in reserve. Assistance in maintaining order may be accompanied by martial law or other special provisions of domestic legislation. But class, ethnic and political schisms are always a danger in internal security operations; every operation is an opportunity to reinforce the effectiveness of the security sector, or undermine it.

When the state’s monopoly of legitimate force is challenged, military forces may find themselves engaged in localized insurgency or a more general civil war, in which factions are trying to usurp the government of the state. This is often accompanied by an abuse of the legal framework within which forces should be controlled. Indeed, it may be the abuse of that framework that has helped spawn the insurgency or undermine the legitimacy of government in the first place. Insurgency, civil war or attenuated government authority are some of the factors that turn a natural disaster into a complex humanitarian emergency.⁹

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

International responses to complex emergencies carry some risk, but also present the opportunity to bolster effective security sectors, by modelling good civil military relations, and by supporting the local military and police in operations that will build trust between government, civilians and the security sector. Of course, they can also get it wrong and set back the reform process.

A natural disaster on its own is not a complex emergency. The key ingredient that makes it one is conflict. Complex emergencies have at least three characteristics. First, they are multidimensional. This may include war, disease, hunger, poverty and forced migration, overlaying or exacerbating natural disasters. Second, they are created by humans. Natural disasters make them worse, but natural calamities by themselves are excluded from the UN definition of complex emergencies. Third, they are political – and politicized – crises.

The motives of key actors, therefore, need to be understood. In a natural disaster, aid is just aid to innocent victims, but in a complex emergency, aid and victimhood are weapons to be used for political gain (Klugman, 1999).

Coping with disasters is one of the things governments are expected to be able to do for their citizens. Reluctance to call for help is understandable. A government's relationship with its security advisors, military and police leaders will play a key role in decisions. Within the marketplace of competing political constituencies, political parties, government departments and individual politicians at the local and national level (see Figure 1), there will be many different motivations for wanting, and for not wanting, to seek foreign assistance, particularly if that assistance comes with guns and uniforms, inside sensitive areas. Recall that if a disaster disrupts the economy, it affects the tax base. It can undermine government and security. It may be essential to offset the costs of the disaster by getting rapid international help. A disaster may also disrupt or destroy the infrastructure necessary to respond.

There may be good reasons for not accepting help from everyone. Countries may be careful not to stir up memories of past conflicts with neighbours, which may be part of nationalist or secessionist narratives. Countries with fragile sovereignty, irredentist claims against them or areas where government authority is questioned may have difficulty accepting foreign assistance, particularly if it is armed and uniformed.

There are also many motives for countries to offer, or not to offer, help to stricken countries. The advice of military leaders and planners will be important, but may be overshadowed by foreign ministries and development agencies. Once again, this will be shaped by the general climate of civil military relations, as well as legislation, policies and the specific circumstances of the event.

For politicians in nations requesting or providing help, a good offer of help is concrete, immediate and self-contained, with known costs and easily anticipated benefits in the domestic or international context. There are lots of international examples of help ready "on the shelf," designed to permit a quick response: Japan's medical teams, Turkey's earthquake search teams and Canada's Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) represent different models with varying degrees of military content and support. It is normal for countries to use diplomatic channels to make it known informally that they may be willing to assist, and then to await a formal request for assistance through diplomatic channels, although major aid agencies are also involved in broad appeals for help. Sometimes third parties will make a request; the US and French governments, for example, have been known to ask for deployment of the DART to countries of particular concern, where reliable help will be appreciated.

The incentive for intervention in complex emergencies is to stabilize the situation and prevent it from deteriorating. If done right, quick action can be cheaper and more effective than delayed action. Getting it wrong can make matters worse. Consider misinformation that causes mass migration, threatening lives, sometimes as a result of conscious strategies by combatants.

Short-term stabilization makes it easier to preserve what works in a government, society and economic system. But sometimes the way the system works is a source of long-term problems. This is true of security sectors, too. Stabilization can be conservative or transformative, and participants are likely to have mixed motives and objectives. Conservative stabilization may mean keeping the power structure in place, which may do little for those most severely affected by a catastrophe. Transformative stabilization may rebuild infrastructure with more equal access, for the benefit of all, but may be resisted by those who benefit most from the existing order (Collinson, Elhawary and Muggah, 2010). Any stabilization effort presents dilemmas for both local and intervening forces. Corruption is a persistent problem, and can easily be exacerbated by processes set up to expedite assistance (Maxwell et al., 2010). There will be missed opportunities for transformation, and organizational learning takes too long to have much impact; even when individuals can learn from their mistakes, the same errors and omissions seem to recur in one after-action report after another. Military leaders are seldom driving on the big issues, so they need to learn to be effective navigators and passengers. Through their training culture, military forces will often be the most effective repositories of learning to manage and stabilize complex emergencies. All this means that helping military and police forces manage a complex emergency can be one of the most effective vehicles for SSR in transitional countries.

CONCLUSION: WHY IT ALL BEGINS AT HOME

Central to the problem of security sector reform is the challenge of building trusted and effective networks, which permit civil military cooperation in complex operations at home and abroad. States with effective security sectors contribute to disaster response and peacekeeping missions, and their contributions are, at least potentially, ambassadors and models of effective relationships.

The networks of mutual trust and understanding that we build up with civilian authorities at home, and civilian organizations in operations, will ultimately determine our success. Government, economy and society are not assets under command, but elaborate systems to be studied and tested – seldom completely understood, and never static. In this at least, the professionals of contributing states are not much further ahead than professionals of transitional states, and there are opportunities for both to learn.

Cooperation and coordination within a theatre begin with effective civil military relations at home, and an understanding of how those relationships work in the countries with which we have to cooperate. These relationships exist in a context that includes governance, the economy and society. Effective leaders must understand the political, economic and social context within which they operate. Coordination mechanisms cannot be dictated by military doctrine; they have to be thought out in advance, practised at every opportunity and adapted with every change in circumstances. However well CIMIC and CA doctrine is written, our partners are probably not reading it, even if we are. What remains is the civil military relationship on which cooperation depends. Ultimately, civil military relations are not just about subordination of the military to civil authority. They are about effective communication, mutual respect and trust based on experience. When we get that right, every operation is an opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of both the contributing security sector, and that of the host.

NOTES

1. Interviews at Military Police Academy Barro Branco, Sao Paulo, Brazil, August 2012.
2. Sometimes referred to as political, military, economic, social-psychological and informational factors, or diplomatic-informational-military-economic factors in staff college courses.
3. This is based on ideas presented in Putnam (1995). See also Colletta/Cullen (2000) and Woolcock (1998).
4. This is a simplification of some arguments in Giddens (1979). See also references and critiques by Sewell (1992) and Baber (1991).
5. Organizational learning is a major part of crisis response, and crises are learning events for successful organizations (Carley and Harrald, 2008). On civil military relations in one-party states, see Colton (1997).
6. On civil military relations in one-party states, see Colton (1997).
7. On the Bolivarian model in Venezuela, see Trinkunas (2002).
8. These four elements are a minimum. We could go further to describe the 16 articles of defence institution building, described in the NATO Source Book (Van Eeckelen and Fluri, 2006), or the 10 objectives of defence institution building, around which Bucur-Marcu (2009) organizes his description of defence institution building.
9. Burkle (1999) cites the UN definition: "A complex emergency (CE) is defined by the United Nations (UN) as a humanitarian crisis in a country, region, or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single and/or ongoing UN country program."

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