



**Americans on Defense Spending and the War on Terrorism**  
A PIPA/Knowledge Networks Poll

August 2, 2002

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**Introduction**

In the aftermath of September 11th, the administration proposed a substantial increase in defense spending. Many lawmakers have said they believe the American public supports increases in defense spending now that such spending had a clear and compelling focus. But is this correct?

Polling data from various sources have drawn a mixed picture. In February 2002, Gallup found just 33% saying the US is spending too little, while 48% said the US is spending about the right amount and 17% said it was spending too much. But an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll of January 2002 told respondents that, "Congress is considering...increasing defense spending," and simply asked whether they favored or opposed doing so. In that poll, 64% said they favored it.

Often when polls produce seemingly contradictory responses, it indicates the presence of more complex opinions that can be discerned by asking more questions. This study sought to dig deeper, especially in light of the war on terrorism.

To fight terrorism the administration has proposed increasing foreign aid spending as well as defense spending. This raises the question: What does the American public think is the right proportion of increases for these two spending areas?

Other questions addressed include how Americans feel about U.S. and European Union spending on defense; how much the US should spend for defense relative to spending by its potential enemies; and whether defense spending by the United States should be premised on a strategy of protecting other countries unilaterally or as part of a multilateral effort.

To address these questions PIPA and Knowledge Networks conducted a nationwide poll of 1,352 American adults from July 19-30. The margin of error was plus or minus 3 percent.

The poll was fielded by Knowledge networks using its nation-wide research panel, which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and subsequently provided internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to [www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp)

## **FINDINGS**

### **Support for New Spending on Terrorism But Not Net Increase**

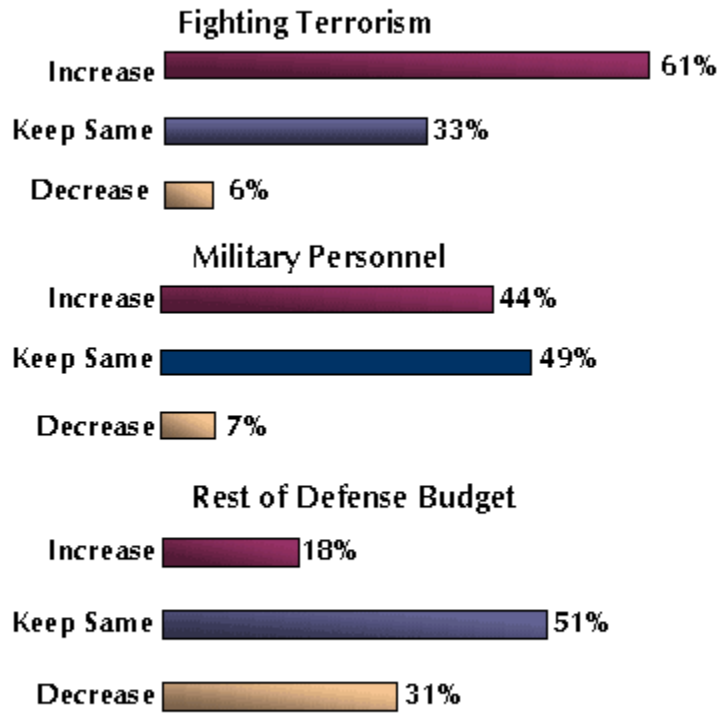
**1. A majority supports increased defense spending to fight terrorism, but not an across-the-board increase. A strong majority believes that fighting terrorism can be safely funded by redirecting funds within the existing budget.**

Respondents were asked whether they wanted to increase, decrease or maintain the current level of spending in several areas of the defense budget. Asked about possible increases in "areas of the defense budget that support the military's ability to fight terrorism, such as for intelligence or special forces," a robust 61% said they favored increasing spending, while only 6% favored cuts, and 33% favored keeping the present level.

Somewhat less popular was "spending on military personnel for salaries, housing and other benefits." Just 44% wanted to increase spending there, while a plurality of 49% wanted to maintain the present level (46%). Only 7% wanted to cut it.

For the remainder of the defense budget there was very little support for increases. Asked about, "the rest of the defense budget that is not for military personnel or necessary for the war on terrorism, such as for submarines or nuclear weapons" only 18% wanted to increase it. A slight majority of 51% wanted to maintain the present level and 31% wanted to decrease it. Republicans favored increases only slightly more (23%) than Democrats (14%) and independents (16%).

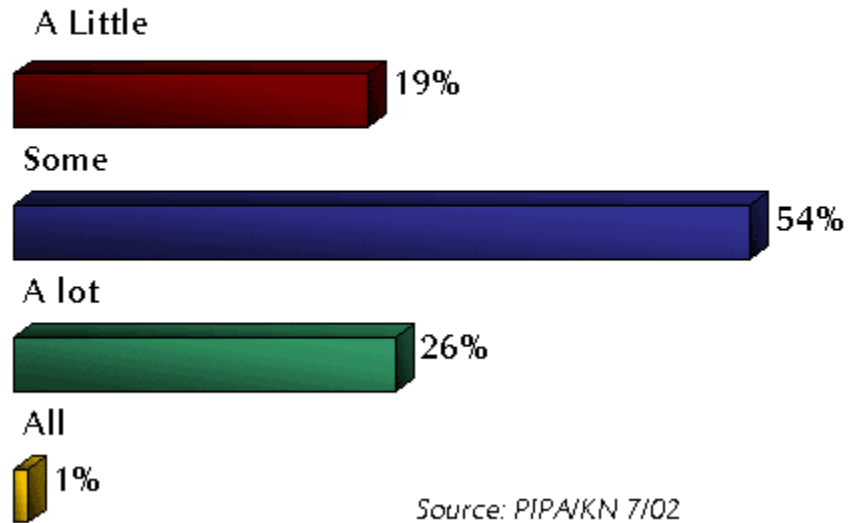
## Spending on Parts of Defense Budget



Source: PIPAKN 7/02

A large majority rejected the argument, made by some Pentagon officials, that virtually all of the defense budget is relevant to the war on terrorism. When asked "how much of the defense budget do you think goes toward things that are necessary for the war on terrorism," just 27% said a lot (26%) or all (1%) while 73% said some (54%) or a little (19%).

How much of the defense budget do you think goes toward things that are necessary for fighting terrorism?



### No Support for Net Increase

Most respondents said that increases in defense spending for fighting terrorism do not necessarily require a net increase in defense spending but can be financed through redistributing the existing defense budget. Asked, "If the government decides to increase spending in the coming year on the military's ability to fight terrorism, do you think that to do this the government can safely shift funds from other areas of the defense budget or it is necessary for the government to increase defense spending overall?" 62% said that the government can safely redistribute funds while just 37% said it is necessary to increase spending overall.

## Net Increase Seen as Unnecessary for Fighting Terrorism

If the government decides to increase spending in the coming year on the military's ability to fight terrorism, do you think that to do this:

it is necessary for the government to increase defense spending overall



37%

the government can safely shift funds from other areas of the defense budget



62%

Source: PIPA/KN 7/02

Similarly, when respondents were given maximum flexibility to specify their preferred level of defense spending, a majority did not favor an overall increase. Respondents were told, "For the year 2002, the United States is spending about 331 billion dollars on defense," and asked, "How much would you like to see the US spend on defense in 2003?" They were allowed to offer any amount they preferred. In this case, a slight majority (52%) gave an amount that was the same (15%) or less (38%) than the current year amount, while 40% gave an amount that was higher.

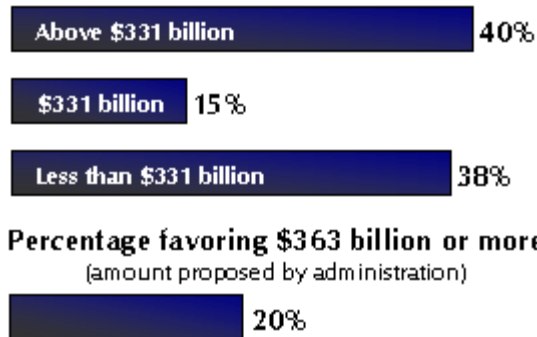
Although more proposed an amount that was higher than lower, the mean (i.e. average) amount proposed was less than the current amount at \$300 billion—a 9% cut. The median proposed level, however, was the current amount. Only 20% favored an amount that was equal or higher than the amount presently being proposed by the administration—\$363 billion.

## Precise Preference for Defense Spending

For the year 2002, the United States is spending about 331 billion dollars on defense. How much would you like to see the US spend on defense in 2003?

**Median: 331 billion**

**Mean: 300 billion**



*Source: PIPA/KN 7/02*

### Explaining Seemingly Discrepant Findings

These findings lend insight into the seemingly inconsistent responses in other polls. As mentioned, NBC/Wall Street Journal in January 2002 told respondents that "Congress is considering...increasing defense spending." When respondents were given only the options of favoring or opposing doing so, 64% said they favored such increases. When this question wording was repeated in the current PIPA/KN poll it elicited even higher support, with 66% favoring it.

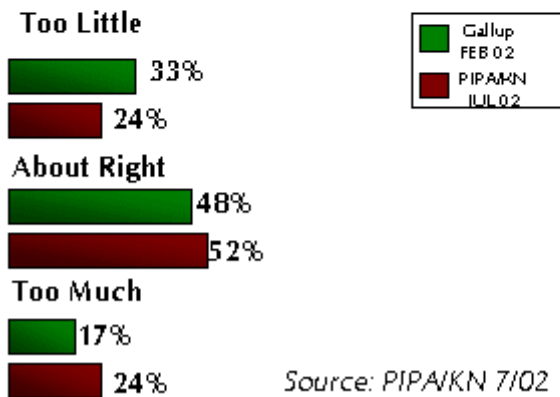
However, as mentioned, when Gallup in February 2002 gave respondents the options of saying that the US is spending too little, too much, or about the right amount, only 33% said the US was spending too little, while 48% said the US is spending the right amount and 17% said it was spending too much. When this question wording was repeated in the current PIPA/KN poll a similar 24% said spending was too little, 52% the right amount and 24% too much.

## Seemingly Inconsistent Polls

(I'm going to read you several proposals that Congress is considering, and for each one, I'd like to know whether you favor or oppose that proposal.)...Increasing defense spending



There is much discussion as to the amount of money the government in Washington should spend for national defense and military purposes. How do you feel about this? Do you think we are spending:



There are two possible and complimentary explanations for this apparent discrepancy. As a general rule when a poll question says that "Congress is considering" new spending and the respondent only has the option of approving or disapproving of it, this will generate higher levels of support than when the respondent is given three different spending options without any of them implicitly given Congressional endorsement.

Second, in the current environment, there is strong support for increased spending to fight terrorism. When told that Congress is considering increased spending, in the current environment this is likely to be associated with increased spending on terrorism. However, as discussed, a strong majority believes that it is possible to increase spending on fighting terrorism without increasing spending overall, by redirecting funds from other parts of the defense budget. Thus it is possible for the majority in one question to say that it supports the increases Congress is considering and to say that it does not think that the current level of defense spending is too little.

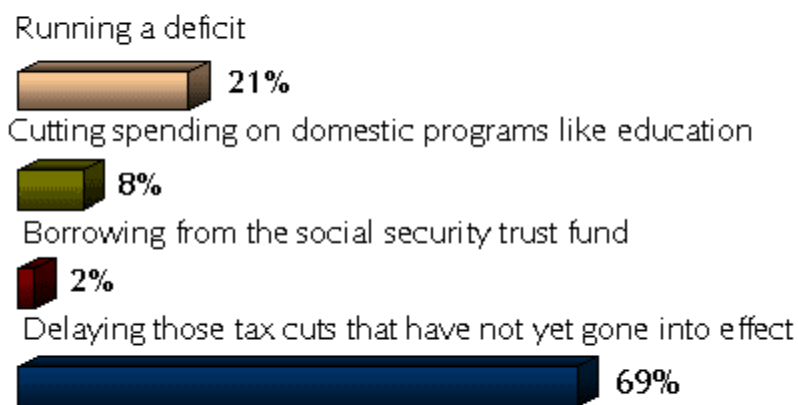
### Increase to Be Paid By Delaying Tax Cuts

**2. If the defense budget is increased, a very strong majority favors delaying the scheduled tax cuts rather than running a deficit or cutting domestic programs.**

Respondents were asked to "suppose the defense budget is increased." They were then told, "Because there is no longer any budget surplus, the money must come from some other source" and asked to choose between four different options.

A large majority of 69% chose the option of "delaying those tax cuts that have not yet gone into effect." (Even among Republicans, 62% chose this option.) Of the other options, 21% chose "running a deficit," 8% opted for "cutting spending on domestic programs like education," and just 2% supported borrowing from the social security trust fund.

## Preferred Revenue Source for Increased Spending



Source: PIPA/KN 7/02

### New Spending on Foreign Aid as Compared to Defense

**3. To fight terrorism, the public favors a much higher proportion of new spending for foreign aid than the administration has proposed.**

Since September 11 numerous political leaders, including the President, have called for spending more on foreign aid to address the problem of terrorism. Respondents were asked to consider how much of the government's overall new spending to fight terrorism should be devoted to defense and how much to foreign aid with the following question:.

Since September 11, some people have called for increasing defense spending to improve America's ability to defend against terrorist attacks and to strike terrorist targets. Other people have called for increasing foreign aid to build goodwill toward the U.S. and to reduce the poverty that can breed terrorists. Imagine that \$100 of your tax money has been reassigned to increase spending on terrorism, but you can say how much of this increase goes to defense spending and how much of it goes to foreign aid. How much of the \$100 would you assign to defense spending and how much to foreign aid?

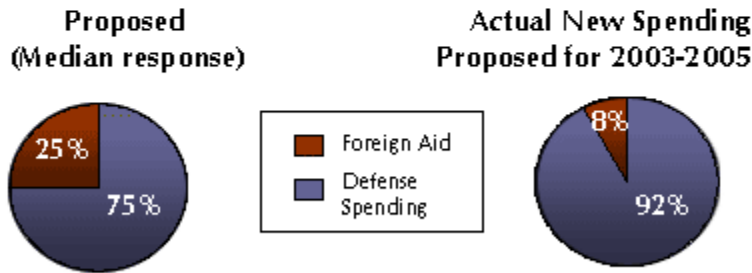
The median respondent allocated \$75 for defense and \$25 for foreign aid—a three to one ratio. This ratio is much more heavily weighted to foreign aid than the administration's proposals which have a ratio of

eighteen to one in favor of defense in the upcoming year, and twelve to one over the next three years as his proposed increases in foreign aid take effect.

Overall, 81% of respondents assigned some new spending to foreign aid (Republicans 78%, Democrats 83%, Independents 81%).

### New Spending on Foreign Aid as Compared to Defense

Since September 11, some people have called for increasing defense spending to improve America's ability to defend against terrorist attacks and to strike terrorist targets. Other people have called for increasing foreign aid to build goodwill toward the US and to reduce the poverty that can breed terrorists. Imagine that \$100 of your tax money has been reassigned to increase spending on terrorism, but you can say how much of this increase goes to defense spending and how much of it goes to foreign aid. How much of the \$100 would you assign to defense spending and how much to foreign aid?



Source: PIPA/KN 7102

### US and EU Defense Spending

#### 4. When told what America and Europe are both spending on defense, a majority said they prefer to see a cut in US spending and an increase in European spending.

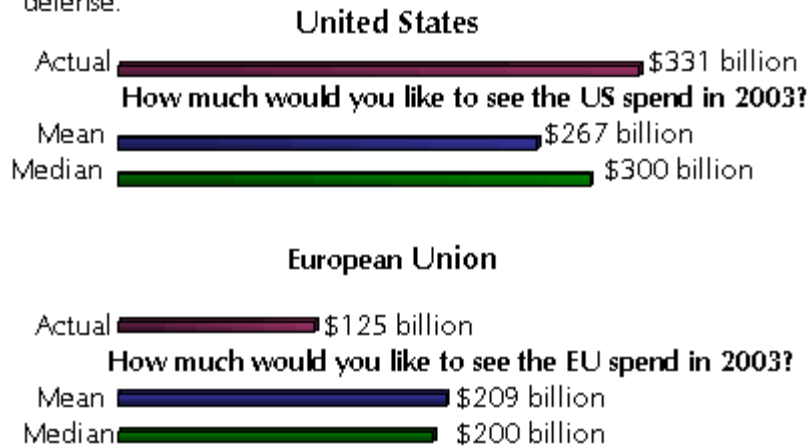
As the European Union has become more unified and potentially more powerful, some American politicians have called on the EU to provide a larger share of defense spending than it presently does. But other Americans have expressed more wariness, warning that with additional spending, Europeans will want additional clout in policymaking, and thus become greater competitors.

To find out how most Americans feel, respondents were told that the United States spends approximately \$331 billion on defense (source: OMB for Department of Defense budget) while the EU spends approximately \$125 billion (source: Center for Defense Information). They were then asked to specify preferred levels for each side.

The median respondent did not raise the EU to the US level, lower the US to the EU level or simply meet in the middle. Instead, the median respondent modestly decreased US spending 9% to \$300 billion (mean \$266 billion) while increasing EU spending 60% to \$200 billion (mean \$208 billion). A majority of 55% cut US spending (kept the same 10%, increased 29%) while 66% increased EU spending (kept the same 10%, cut 18%).

## US and EU Defense Spending

For the year 2002, the United States is spending about 331 billion dollars on defense, while the countries of the European Union combined are spending about 125 billion dollars on defense.



Source: PIP/KN 7102

### Spending Relative to Potential Enemies

#### 5. Asked how much the US should spend on defense as compared to countries that are potential enemies, a strong majority proposes a level far below the actual level.

While the war on terrorism has become a salient focus for current spending increases, US military capabilities are not primarily oriented to conflict with substate terrorist actors but rather to states that could potentially enter into conflict with the US. What is the appropriate level of preparedness the US should have relative to these potential enemies?

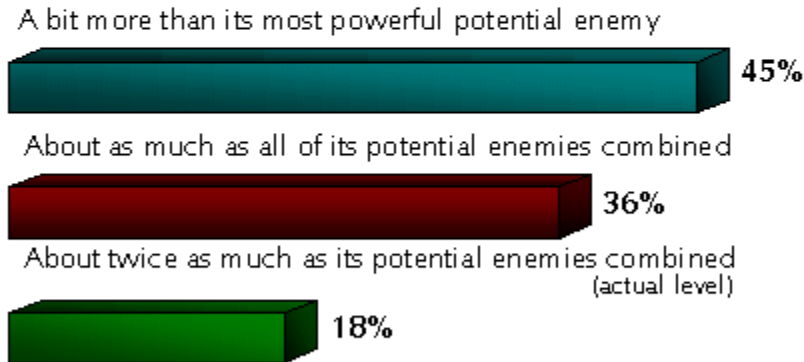
Respondents were asked to consider the appropriate level of US military spending relative to the spending of its potential enemies - which the poll defined as Russia, China, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, and Libya (a group that includes all of the nations characterized as the "axis of evil"). While such aggregated spending provides a rough measure, it constitutes one way for average Americans to express their broad attitudes about relative military preparedness.

The most popular of three options-chosen by 45%-- was the lowest spending level offered, in which the United States would spend "a bit more than its most powerful enemy." Thirty-six percent chose the option of the US spending "about as much as all of its potential enemies combined." Just 18% chose the option of spending "twice as much as all of its potential enemies combined."

While there are various methods for assessing the level of defense spending by other countries, most efforts to make such estimates have placed the combined spending of the countries listed as potential enemies at roughly half the level of US spending. Thus it appears that only a small minority of supports the current level of relative spending.

## Spending as Compared to Potential Enemies

I would like you to think about how much the US should spend on defense as compared to countries that are its potential enemies. For discussion's sake, let's include as potential enemies Russia, China, North Korea, Iraq, Iran and Libya.



Source: PIPAKN 7/02

### Fulfilling Defense Commitments Multilaterally

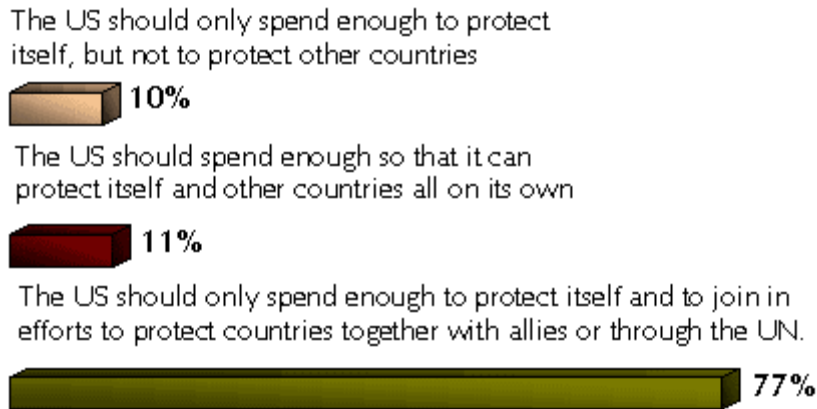
**6. A very strong majority says that defense spending should be based on the assumption that Washington will fulfill its obligations to protect other countries as part of multilateral efforts, not on its own.**

The majority of US defense spending is not devoted to capabilities to defend the U.S. mainland but rather to fulfill US commitments to defend various other countries if attacked. A controversy in US force planning is whether the US should have the capability to fulfill these commitments on its own or if it should assume that it will have the help of allies. The fact that, for the most part, US force planning is based on the assumption that the US will act on its own has a major impact on requirements for US forces. Clearly this question also has major implications for the nature of America's role in the world.

To address this issue respondents were told, "Right now, the size of US defense budget is based on the need for the US to have the capability to fulfill commitments it has made to protect a number of other countries if they are attacked. Here are three positions people have taken on US defense spending." Of the three options presented, only 11% chose the one that said that the US "the US should spend enough so that it can protect itself and other countries all on its own." However only 10% chose the option that, "the US should only spend enough to protect itself, but not to protect other countries." The overwhelming majority of 77% chose the option, "the US should only spend enough to protect itself and to join in efforts to protect countries together with allies or through the UN." This majority was a bit larger among Republicans (82%) than Democrats (75%).

## Should US Assume Multilateral Participation?

Right now, the size of the US defense budget is based on the need for the US to have the capability to fulfill commitments it has made to protect a number of other countries if they are attacked. Here are three positions people have taken on US defense spending.



Source: PIPA/KN 7/02

### Methodology:

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Menlo Park, California, with a randomly selected sample of its large-scale nationwide research panel. This panel is itself randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access). The distribution of the sample in the web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the US population on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc.

The panel is recruited using stratified random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone sampling. RDD provides a non-zero probability of selection for every US household having a telephone. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Web access and an Internet appliance, which uses a telephone line to connect to the Internet and uses the television as a monitor. In return, panel members participate in surveys three to four times a month. Survey responses are confidential, with identifying information never revealed without respondent approval. When a survey is fielded to a panel member, he or she receives an e-mail indicating that the survey is available for completion. Surveys are self-administered.

For more information about the methodology, please go to <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp>.

## Acknowledgements

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**The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)** is a joint program of the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland and the Center on Policy Attitudes. PIPA undertakes research on American attitudes in both the public and in the policymaking community toward a variety of international and foreign policy issues. It seeks to disseminate its findings to members of government, the press, and the public as well as academia.

**Knowledge Networks** is a polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo park, California. Knowledge Networks uses a large-scale nationwide research panel which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephonics and is subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is into limited to those who already have internet access).

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Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, Phil Warf and Monica Wolford designed the questionnaire and wrote the analysis.

Knowledge Network's Stefan Subias adapted the questionnaire and managed the fielding of the poll

Trent Perrotto, Monika Kachinskiene, Roman Gershkovich and Batsuuri Haltar contributed to the production of the report.

The search of existing poll data was done with the aid of the Roper POLL database.

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