

# SPREADING FREEDOM

## *Public Diplomacy and Democracy-Building*

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### THE ISSUES

By now, it is accepted as self-evident that democracies do not engage in aggression against their neighbors or intentionally disturb the peace of the world. Contemporary history would be much more peaceful if, for example, Iraqis had some form of limited constitutional or democratic government like that of their neighbors in Jordan. Saddam Hussein's aggressive, criminal regime would simply not be generating the current serious discourse about a possible war. To the extent that U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy can foster the spread of democracy, the world will become more hospitable to freedom and to America.

Greater democracy will also mean less dependence on U.S. military intervention to protect American global interests. This is not to say that the United States should play the role of global police officer, or that it should attempt to impose its concept of democracy on recalcitrant people in other countries. To proud and ancient nations, cultural imperialism can be as hateful as military

imperialism. But the United States can and should help foster the growth of indigenous democratic institutions wherever conditions are favorable, based on the traditional principle that America is the friend of freedom everywhere, though guardian only of its own. A modest investment of effort and resources to shape a freer and more democratic world will pay enormous dividends over the years, and perhaps prevent future conflicts that would demand greater expenditure of American blood and resources.

One of the most efficient and cost-effective ways to promote the growth of democratic institutions on every continent is for Americans to communicate directly with people in other countries. American businesses, the mass media, and even non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are effective in demonstrating to other societies how having the freedom to live and do business creates a dynamic economy and a vibrant society. American policymakers should also have direct access to these

audiences to explain the value of freedom. In this era of global telecommunications and media saturation, it is possible to send information to even the remotest locations through high-quality television and radio programming and the Internet. Direct communication with the general population of other countries and their power elite is the best example of public diplomacy.

American public diplomacy encompasses many different information-sharing and cultural activities between the U.S. government and other countries. As the "people-to-people" component of foreign policy, it includes visits, student and academic exchanges, and even exhibitions about America. It is carefully designed to further the interests of the United States by influencing public opinion abroad. It normally occurs outside of the standard channels of foreign diplomacy. The role of public diplomacy is increasing, even as the State Department conducts formal diplomatic relations with other nations and executive branch offices engage in direct contact with foreign heads of state. All of these activities are important in promoting U.S. interests abroad.

Public diplomacy is not a frivolous "feel good" exercise. It is a vital tool in a hard-headed foreign policy that promotes American interests around the world. America recognizes that projecting democratic and free-market ideas into a global information environment has strategic value and can affect the course of events in a country dramatically. Recent history offers a good example. In the victory of America and the West over Soviet communism, military power had kept the "Evil Empire" contained. But, in the end, it was the barrage of ideas and information, not bombs and bullets, that brought the rotten Soviet edifice crumbling down. The Soviets could not compete in the modern world without opening their captive empire to new forms of information and communications technology. Once the Soviet leaders allowed this to happen, they could no longer isolate the Russian people from Western ideals of democracy and individual liberty. The communication and popularization of these ideals eroded the legitimacy of communism and spelled the end of a system that had seemed impregnable. This means that, to achieve that noble goal elsewhere, international broadcasting and democracy assistance to non-governmental organizations abroad,

such as the Polish Solidarity movement, must be an integral part of foreign and defense policy.

**Emerging Democracies.** The end of the two-superpower confrontation unleashed potent forces that had been bottled up by 45 years of Cold War. Today, tribal, ethnic, and religious conflict, rogue regimes, transnational organized crime, and economic disorder are threatening world peace and stability, posing challenges to the interests and security of the United States never before experienced.

In this dangerous and fractious world, new nations and new ideologies are struggling to grow and other nations are trying to throw off the destructive legacy of despotism and make a transition to democracy. It is in America's best interest to assist those emerging democracies with direct military or economic aid, when appropriate, and with diplomatic and moral support as well. There are limits to the extent that proliferating conflicts can be contained with military power and traditional diplomacy. Influencing the hearts and minds of key players and the public becomes a necessity for the international environment of the next millennium. However, it must be acknowledged that limited government by the consent of the governed, individual liberty and dignity, and economic freedom—the hallmarks of a viable democracy—are not universally recognized or widely understood principles, however much Americans may take them for granted. Consequently, one of the best ways for America to help emerging democracies is by creating a fertile soil for the growth of free institutions through the medium of public diplomacy.

**Public Diplomacy at Work.** The U.S. Information Agency (USIA) is responsible for overall coordination of American public diplomacy. It maintains offices—or "field posts"—in many foreign countries which conduct direct people-to-people information activities. The primary arm of American public diplomacy is an international broadcasting network, including the Voice of America (VOA), which broadcasts to almost every region of the globe. USIA's budget request for FY 1999 is just over \$1.1 billion.

The Administration has requested \$276 million for the Voice of America in FY 1999. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) is aimed at regions

once under Soviet domination. RFE/RL offers a unique form of public diplomacy called “surrogate broadcasting” because it gives journalists who come from countries without freedom of expression an opportunity to broadcast back into their home countries. The Administration has requested \$70 million for RFE/RL in FY 1999. Surrogate stations include Radio and TV Martí, which cover communist Cuba, and Radio Free Asia, aimed at China, Vietnam, Burma (Myanmar), and other Asian countries. The budget request for Radio Free Asia in FY 1999 is \$19 million. (See Table 20.1.)

Television is truly becoming the most influential mass medium. Worldnet TV, which distributes U.S. programs through USIA field posts, is the government’s television arm. The Voice of America has launched its own TV production operations, based on individual language services. However, the VOA has been slow to develop modern and competitive TV broadcasting. It is not likely to become a major player in key foreign media markets because of internal organizational and personnel problems and budget limitations—a sad statement for the country that invented television.

All told, U.S. radio and television efforts account for 1,750 hours of programming each week, reaching over 100 million people in English and over

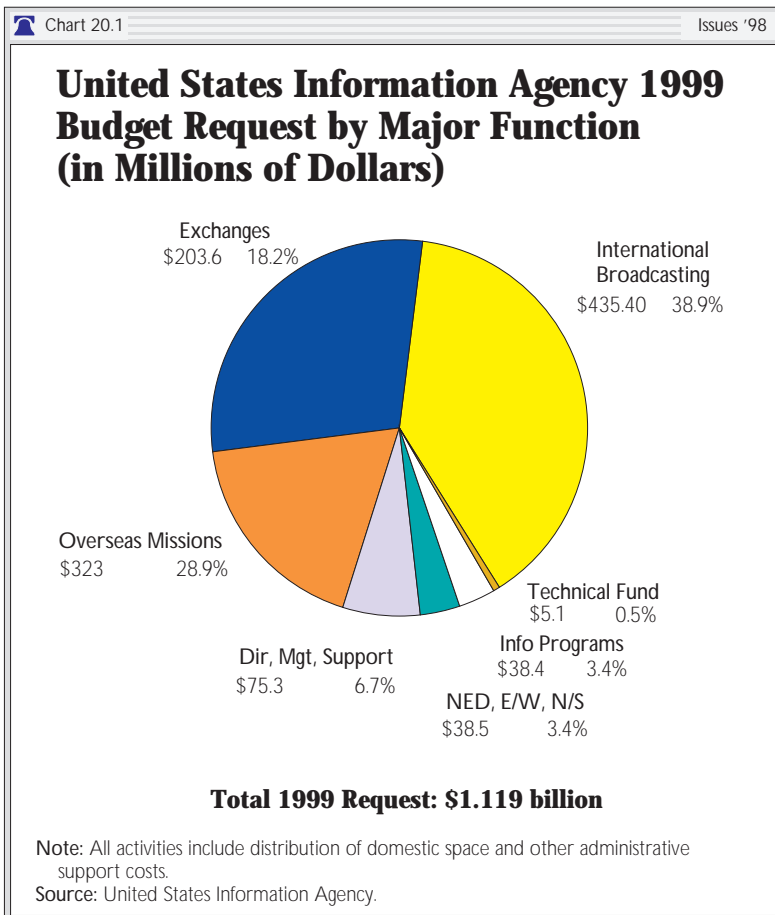


Table 20.1 Issues '98

### USIA Appropriations, 1993–1999

	BBG, VOA, Worldnet, Engineering, Other	Thousands of Dollars			Total
		Broadcasting to Cuba	Radio Free Asia	BIB RFE/RL	
1993	\$253,051	\$28,531	\$ —	\$220,000	\$501,582
1994	256,110	21,000	—	210,000	487,110
1995	237,597	24,735	5,000	237,019	504,351
1996	252,443	24,775	5,000	71,400	353,618
1997	247,431	25,000	9,300	68,419	350,150
1998	269,339*	22,095	24,100	69,350	384,884
1999 Request	276,309	22,704	19,400	70,277	388,690

Notes: \*Excludes \$1,626,000 in FY 1998 transferred to the International Information Programs (IIP) account for Worldnet TV programs.  
In 1999, the Administration proposes to fund all of the Agency's broadcasting operations in the “International Broadcasting Operations” appropriations account. (Broadcasting to Cuba was appropriated to a separate account in 1998 and prior years as was funding for Radio Free Asia in 1995.)  
Source: United States Information Agency.

60 languages. No other broadcasting effort (not even the global reach of CNN) touches as wide and strategically important an audience worldwide, explaining and promoting American values and the official positions of the U.S. government.

The U.S. Information Agency also conducts important information and cultural activities, with programming aimed directly at foreign populations. For example, USIA maintains libraries around the world and hosts an extensive program of cultural exchanges. Its Foreign Press centers help foreign journalists cover the United States and channel news and ideas back to their home countries. Through the USIA International Visitors program, foreigners can visit the United States and experience democracy and the free enterprise system firsthand. Reciprocally, American experts and representatives from various public and private institutions—as well as U.S. government officials—frequently travel abroad with USIA sponsorship to explain aspects of American society to foreign academics, executives, the media, and general audiences.

**The National Endowment for Democracy (NED).** The National Endowment for Democracy is a nonprofit grant-making institution that was created in 1983 to strengthen free institutions and foster ideas of individual liberty in emerging democracies. Though it is not a U.S. government agency, it receives federal funds. And although it is not formally a part of the U.S. public diplomacy apparatus, its mission is so closely related that it should be considered part of the overall effort to promote democracy through people-to-people contact in foreign countries.

The NED supports non-governmental groups in 90 countries. It funds democratic activists through direct grants and works through U.S. grant recipients, including four “core” institutions: the Center for International Private Enterprise, the Free Trade Union Institute, the International Republican Institute, and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs.

The NED has played an important role in aiding democratic movements in the former Soviet bloc, China, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Nicaragua, Vietnam, and elsewhere. For example, with Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenka growing increasingly

authoritarian, it provided ten grants to bolster human rights “watchdog” organizations, pro-democracy NGOs, and independent trade unions in that country. It also has established a successful track record in Russia and Eurasia, funding a national publication in Russia dedicated to civic education, as well as human rights and civics curriculum development for schools, journalism training, and a public interest law firm, and has funded the development of pro-democracy civics curricula in Latvia and Estonia.

Table 20.2 Issues '98

### National Endowment for Democracy Appropriation

Thousands of Dollars

	1998 Estimate	1999 Request	Increase
Central and Eastern Europe	\$3,676	\$3,726	\$50
New Independent States	3,907	3,957	50
Africa	3,014	3,064	50
Asia	5,039	5,739	700
Middle East	3,270	3,320	50
Latin America and the Caribbean	3,896	3,946	50
Multi-Regional/Miscellaneous	2,450	2,450	—
International Forum	308	308	—
Administration	4,440	4,390	50
<b>Total Appropriations</b>	<b>30,000</b>	<b>31,000</b>	<b>1,000</b>

Source: United States Information Agency.

The NED has bolstered independent political media coverage to monitor corruption-ridden Mexican politics. It also has provided key assistance to democratic foundations and independent media in Serbia, Bosnia, and Kosovo—a modest investment to prevent a much more expensive military intervention in the future. The federal share of the NED’s “venture capital,” a modest \$31 million requested for FY 1999, has had a significant impact in creating the building blocks necessary to sustain emerging democratic systems: representative political parties, a free-market economy, independent trade unions, and a free press. Yet the NED’s budget is ten times smaller than a similar private effort underwritten by billionaire George Soros.

### Misconceptions About Public Diplomacy.

Some liberals believe that public diplomacy is just a polite form of propaganda that provides camouflage for the improper activities of the U.S. government. This position flows from the Left's traditional "blame America" attitude. Those who hold this view evidently believe that American institutions are deeply flawed and that America's founding principles are irrelevant to nations struggling to find their way in the chaotic post-Cold War era. By comparison, people on the opposite side of the political spectrum believe that America should concentrate more on solving its internal domestic problems, which include ending excessive federal spending. Thus, in their view, the need to reach foreign peoples with American ideals must be subordinated to the need for economizing.

Public diplomacy—in particular, U.S. government broadcasting—is a relatively inexpensive way to convey the ideas and values that can help make the world friendlier to the United States and its national interests. The total funding requested by the USIA for FY 1999 is just over \$1.1 billion. Shaping peace in the world can prevent conflicts and minimize the intensity of disputes, thus mak-

ing public diplomacy one of the most cost-effective tools of foreign policy. In addition to advancing international understanding of American values, the USIA has had great success in other areas, such as encouraging an "Open Sky" policy that allows U.S. civilian carriers to fly over Japan's air space, enlisting the help of Hungarian journalists in promoting NATO enlargement, and bringing together Israelis and Palestinians. These are just a few of its valuable projects.

There is no consensus in Congress or in the Administration on how much the United States should spend on public diplomacy. But these decisions should not be made in a vacuum: They are directly related to America's overall national security strategy and foreign policy objectives.

The United States still faces despotic regimes and the possibility of violent confrontations, both in the Middle East and in areas potentially affected by the resurgence of Russian communists and nationalist hard-liners. America's voice of freedom and democracy must be able to reach audiences wherever U.S. interests may collide with future adversaries.

## THE FACTS

- **The United States Information Agency (USIA)** "spends nearly \$1 billion annually on radio broadcasting, exchanges, and a variety of press and public affairs activities intended to 'inform and influence' foreign publics. USIA spends only \$5 million—of which a mere \$1.9 million is for polling—on opinion surveys, research studies, and other tools essential to 'understanding' foreign attitudes and cultures."<sup>1</sup>
- The **"USIA** spends \$101 million annually on the Voice of America, \$94 million on surrogate radios (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, and Radio Mari) and \$116 million on signal delivery costs."<sup>2</sup>
- The USIA oversees 68 **exchange programs**, including the Fulbright and International Visitors programs.<sup>3</sup>
- The **USIA** also conducts important information and cultural activities, such as professional and cultural exchanges, and maintains libraries around the world. Through the International Visitors program, some 5,000 foreign-

### Notes:

1. Lewis Manilow *et al.*, "A New Diplomacy for the Information Age," United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, Washington D.C., November 1996, p. 8.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

ers visit the United States each year and experience democracy and the free enterprise system firsthand.

- Through the **Worldnet** satellite linkup, USIA field posts provide coverage of important events, conduct televised press conferences, and distribute video programming.
- The **USIA** has lost almost one-third of its staff since 1988—down from 9,106 authorized positions in 1989 to 6,772 positions planned for FY 1999. Its budget in constant dollars has declined from \$1,368 million in 1994 to a projected \$976 million in FY 1999.
- The U.S. government's primary public diplomacy **broadcasting arms** are the Voice of America (VOA), which broadcasts to nearly 100 million people worldwide; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), which broadcast to areas once under Soviet domination; Radio Free Asia, which broadcasts to China, Vietnam, Burma (Myanmar), and other East Asian countries; and Radio Martí, which broadcasts to communist Cuba. Radio Free Iran and Radio Free Iraq will be harbored organizationally by RFE/RL.
- The **Voice of America** budget request for FY 1999 is \$276 million.
- **Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty** offers "surrogate broadcasting" time for journalists who

come from countries without freedom of expression to broadcast into their home countries. The RFE/RL federal grant request for FY 1999 is \$70 million. Surrogate stations include Radio and TV Martí and Radio Free Asia. Radio Free Asia's FY 1999 request is \$19 million.

- The **National Endowment for Democracy** provides funding to institutions around the world concerned with human rights, rule of law, and freedom of the press. The NED supports such non-governmental groups in 90 countries. The federal share of NED's budget request for FY 1999 is a modest \$31 million.
- The U.S. Agency for International Development (**AID**) receives the majority of funding for promoting democracy in Eastern and Central Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). AID, however, has no prior experience in the former Soviet region, and its activities are concentrated not on democracy building, but on rural development in Third World countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.
- The Administration has requested \$1.39 billion for AID in FY 1999 for the **Support for East European Democracy** (SEED) program and **Freedom Support Act** initiatives for Europe and the New Independent States; some of this funding is for democracy-building.

## THE RECORD

The Clinton Administration has failed either to formulate a sound and coherent policy on the importance of public diplomacy or to place sufficient emphasis on how it advances U.S. interests throughout the world. Furthermore, the Administration has presided over a precipitous decline in the personnel and budgets of the United States Information Agency, the principal arm of U.S. public diplomacy. Despite challenges from Russia, China, and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Administration appears to be unwilling to pay this relatively minor but important portion of the price of international leadership.

In the past, neither Congress nor the Administration provided adequate support for U.S. international broadcasting. For example, the Voice of America, the federal government's primary broadcasting medium, was severely slashed by congressional "deficit hawks" in 1996, resulting in the loss of 400 uniquely skilled personnel and the ability to broadcast in 20 foreign languages. These cuts came on top of cuts mandated in the FY 1994 International Broadcasting Act, which cut 900 staff at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and 350 at the VOA.

Because of these cuts, the VOA, RFE/RL, and other American broadcasters are unable to take full advantage of the AM and FM broadcasting, Internet-based text, and live audio and video communication opportunities that otherwise would be available to them. They have been given only a limited ability to reach other peoples the world over through state-of-the-art information technology. Radio Free Iran and Radio Free Iraq finally are being launched after a decade of delay, although the clear need to broadcast into those critical regions existed much earlier.

Although the technical revolution may be transforming the private sector, it is not utilized fully in the federal government. Production of television programming by the VOA is meeting organizational and budgetary resistance. The computerization necessary for establishing an adequate VOA presence—with live audio and video deliverable on the information superhighway—is advancing very slowly, with no set dates for live Internet broadcasting. Transition to AM/FM broadcasting is moving slowly as well. Only 1,200 AM/FM stations around the world carry the VOA signal today. The number for RFE/RL is much lower at 70 stations. Many more stations need to be enlisted.

The President's policy of courting labor unions has exacerbated pervasive labor problems at the VOA. Employee unions have managed to undermine management's ability to develop new broadcasting modalities and to hire and fire personnel as needed.

The Clinton Administration disperses media and public opinion research functions among the USIA, VOA, and RFE/RL. This diffuse arrangement has led to management redundancies and prevents the creation of a single mechanism for research that would be responsive to policymakers' needs in the conduct of public diplomacy.

Although the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and National Public Radio attract multimillion dollar sponsors, there has been little or no VOA, Radio Liberty, or Radio Free Asia outreach to get transnational corporations and foundations to underwrite their broadcasts. With their large and established audiences in developing markets, however, the VOA and other U.S. international broadcasters could become attractive advertising outlets and earn funding that partially supports their broadcasts.

The National Endowment for Democracy's budget has declined from \$35 million in FY 1994 to \$31 million requested for FY 1999. Both budget hawks and isolationist "doves" tend to seek NED budget cuts, disregarding the necessary role that the NED plays in public diplomacy. Insufficient funding for the NED leaves the international democracy-building field in the hands of inefficient and inexperienced employees of the U.S. Agency for International Development, which attempts to monopolize and control U.S. government funding for democracy development. (See Chapter 16.)

## WHAT TO DO IN 1999

- **Incorporate public diplomacy more coherently into U.S. foreign policy instead of treating it as a mere adjunct to formal diplomacy.** Public diplomacy efforts based on advances in information technology and targeted outreach to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-governmental elites should be put firmly in place. Personnel policy should also be adjusted for the information age. For example, the Administration's nominations of foreign service and ambassadorial representatives should take into account each nominee's ability to communicate American principles of democracy and U.S. foreign policy objectives coherently and effectively.
- **Clearly show in budget submissions for the USIA and the international broadcasting agencies how the allocation of resources and prioritizing of activities relates to specific foreign policy objectives.** This will enable Congress to understand more clearly what benefits the nation is receiving for its public diplomacy expenditures.

- **Provide adequate funds for international broadcasting.** This means allocating at least \$285 million for the VOA and keeping RFE/RL, Radio Free Asia, and Radio Martí at FY 1998 levels, with the total international broadcasting allocation at \$400 million.
- **Allow private and nonprofit sponsorship of programming.** Pursuing corporate and foundation funding and sponsorship for the international broadcasting efforts of the VOA and other radio and TV stations would promote their activities and help ensure their success. The successful private funding efforts by the Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio provide good models. Congress should design timetables and goals to implement this diversification of funding. The International Board of Governors, which oversees international broadcasting, and the leadership of USIA must design and implement the proper management structures to obtain alternative funding.
- **Consolidate all media and public opinion research functions of international broadcasters under one roof.** This would streamline the management of international broadcasting efforts, save money, and increase the critical supply of resources and expertise.
- **Provide sufficient funds to allow the National Endowment for Democracy to continue operating at current levels.** For FY 1999, the NED will need approximately \$31 million.
- **Shift democracy-building funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development to the National Endowment for Democracy.** Congress should examine whether the allocation of democracy-building funding to AID is appropriate or creates redundancy with existing funding to the NED and its subsidiaries. Despite spending hundreds of millions of dollars in the Commonwealth of Independent States and European region, AID's "democracy-building" efforts did not prevent Russian communists from capturing a plurality of seats in the Duma in 1995 or President Alexander Lukashenka of Belarus from turning his country into an authoritarian dictatorship. The USIA and NED have direct experience in supporting democratic institutions, and their efforts are much more effective in this region. They should receive the bulk of funding for these activities.
- **Increase funding for long-term training in democratic institutions for government officials from the New Independent States (NIS).** Educating a post-communist government elite would contribute significantly to the development of democracy in the NIS. Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan urgently need to train their current and future diplomats, civilian national security specialists, military officers, and police officers to ensure that democratic institutions take hold.

## Q & A

**Q. Now that the Cold War is over, isn't public diplomacy—especially international government-sponsored broadcasting—unnecessary?**

**A.** America still needs an effective voice to promote democratic and free-market values in the competitive global marketplace of ideas where a struggle for freedom is still being waged. Other nations, many unfriendly to the United States, are targeting their ideas aggressively to

this market. The radical Islamic regime in Iran is a notable example; Saddam Hussein's Iraq is another. America needs to be fully engaged in the war of ideas in order to shape the kind of world it hopes to have in the next century.

**Q. American values can reach the world through popular broadcast media, CNN, and many forms of popular entertainment. Why do we need the Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, or Radio Martí?**



**A.** Much American entertainment—for example, rock music and Hollywood films—actually gives other nations a distorted view of American society and government, and has been used as an excuse for some governments to condemn the United States. Although CNN is virtually a global network, it does not reach an audience nearly as wide, diverse, or strategically targeted as that reached by U.S. government broadcasting. Furthermore, CNN does not provide the same depth, content, or policy-relevant information and does not explain or defend the positions of the United States. The U.S. government, under a President of either party, should have the “surge capacity” to present the official U.S. government viewpoint to officials and publics abroad.

**Q. How should international broadcasters and others interested in promoting democracy exploit the technological revolution in telecommunications?**

**A.** First, U.S. international broadcasting should be moving much more aggressively to the FM and AM bandwidths. Only in areas where rebroadcasting through local stations is impossible should primary frequencies remain in the short wave bands. Today, many media outlets around the world are also “online” on the Internet. They are eager consumers of USIA, VOA, Radio Liberty, and other media productions, including news, commentary, features, and music. This trend should be promoted while live American television signals, radio, and text are made more available on the Internet, in English and in other languages.

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